

RECEPTIVE AUTONOMY
A PSYCHOANALYTIC ETHICS OF CREATIVE DISCONTENT

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In contemporary political theory, the concept of autonomy generally signifies a liberal notion of rational choice and non-dependence. Theorists critical of liberalism often conceive of autonomy as inherently bound to a liberal vision of the subject, and, accordingly, they largely dismiss autonomy as a concept worthy of interrogation. I contend, however, that autonomy exceeds the confines of its liberal representation and retains political value when figured as a mode of being conducive to the development of practices potentially opposed to an ethos of liberalism. To contest critical political theory's dismissal of autonomy and to counter the dominance of liberal theories of autonomy, I return to the concept from the perspective of psychoanalysis to develop a notion of "receptive autonomy," an ethical comportment productive of capacities of critique, creativity, and self-direction.

I turn to psychoanalysis and feminist psychoanalysis to conceptualize receptive autonomy because both strains of thought work to undermine fundamental liberal attributes of subject-hood and agency: subjectivity as implicitly masculine, abstract, and rational, and agency as willful, non-dependent, and self-contained. In opposition to liberal theory, psychoanalytic and feminist theories look to questions of freedom and personal autonomy while assuming a relational and emotive subject. Through the work of feminist psychoanalytic theorists Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, Jessica Benjamin, and Joan Copjec, among others, I specify how autonomy does not require detachment from others and otherness, as assumed in liberal theory, but rather an openness to the interdependencies and uncertainties that accompany relationality.

In chapter one, I provide a general sketch of the relationship between liberalism and autonomy and show how liberal theorist John Rawls has played a significant role in establishing the ostensibly natural link between Kantian autonomy and liberal ideals. Against Rawls's reading of Kant, I suggest that autonomy entails not the self's capacity to follow rationally chosen morals but the self's capacity to break with the morality of the phenomenal world, the morality of the collectively given. I turn to Lacanian interpretations of Kant's moral theory to explain how autonomy involves a critical stance toward common ways of reasoning, normative values, and accepted ways of being. This initial psychoanalytic interpretation of Kantian autonomy provides a basis for my subsequent engagement with the work of various schools of psychoanalysis as a means to develop my theory of an ethics of receptive autonomy.

Chapter two looks to the work of Jacques Lacan to show how the subject acquires the ability to act in defiance of accustomed ways of being by remaining attentive to that which appears outside of normative discourse and might seem shocking and "other." Joan Copjec's theory of love as linked to an ethics of social refusal specifies how, in opening to the uncertainty of proximity to otherness, the self grows more aware of its contours and its potential to engage critically and creatively with the social world in which it exists. I give shape to my theory of receptive autonomy as an ethical comportment of openness to the inarticulable aspects of being that become more apparent in loving encounters, encounters which intensify the subject's desire for something beyond the merely socially possible.

In chapter three, I draw from Freud, Jessica Benjamin, and Elisabeth Young-Bruehl to survey the reciprocal currents of affection conducive to a comportment of receptive autonomy. I look to the work of Freud and his followers to clarify how a socialized denial of

conditions of vulnerability and dependency, in favor of a defensive approach to these conditions, shrinks the self's capacity to inhabit a critical position with respect to possibly detrimental social norms. Examining liberal notions of autonomy as part of an American cultural resistance to dependency, I explore the ways in which liberal modes of thought produce social norms that encourage resistance to the openness necessary for critical and creative self-direction. This chapter elucidates the paradoxical nature of liberal autonomy—that the very ideals associated with autonomy in its liberal form work against the social realization of autonomy defined as a capacity for self-direction.

I elaborate further on the pathways that lead to receptive autonomy and expand upon the facets of this ethical comportment in chapter four. I look to the 2015 uprising in West Baltimore, following the death of Freddie Gray, as an exemplar of an ethics of receptive autonomy. Turning to Martin Luther King Jr.'s address to the American Psychological Association in 1967, I extend his notion of "creative maladjustment" to describe the aspects of refusal and creativity implied in receptive autonomy as an ethics of creative discontent. Through King's notion of creative maladjustment and Freud's understanding of social discontent as well as Alenka Zupančič's portrayal of the subversive effects of the psychoanalytic encounter, I present a reading of the Baltimore uprising as an enactment of productive social refusal allied with the imaginative and disruptive facets of psychoanalysis.

My theorization of autonomy challenges the theoretical depiction of political autonomy as either a state of non-dependence, as in liberalism, or as an illusion of non-dependence, as in much critical and feminist theory. In opposition to these portrayals of autonomy as related to non-dependence, this dissertation looks to psychoanalysis to advance a notion of autonomy as a particularly relational ethos of social critique and creative intervention. I maintain the worth of thinking through what it might mean to inhabit a comportment of autonomy by attending to valuable aspects of autonomy, the capacity for self-direction, critical evaluation, and creativity. As exemplified in my reading of the Baltimore uprising, the value of these aspects of autonomy lies in how they enable the possibility of radical social-political change. In presenting an account of an ethics of receptive autonomy and its positive political implications, this dissertation offers an alternative to the normative liberal vision of autonomy while affirming the crucial political value of an ethical capacity for self-direction.

CONTENTS

Introduction: Resurrecting Autonomy	1
Chapter One: The Autonomous Subject and Psychoanalysis.....	27
Liberal Autonomy	30
Kant with Rawls	35
Feminist Critiques of Liberal Autonomy	37
Feminists Reimagine Autonomy	44
Autonomy and Psychoanalysis	48
Kant avec Lacan	51
The Role of Love	74
Chapter Two: Ethics and the Ruptured Subject.....	78
Lacan's Ruptured Subject.....	81
Desire: The Failure of Language.....	85
Sexual Difference and Feminine Ethos	89
Lacan's Ethics: <i>Antigone</i> and Autonomy.....	96
Joan Copjec: Love as Sublimation	106
Alenka Zupančič: L' Entre Deux and Dissidence	115
Breaking Away	119
An Ethics of Receptive Autonomy	128
Chapter Three: The Nourished Self	138
Autonomy as Freedom <i>from</i> Others	144
The Affectionate Current.....	148
Oceanic Feeling.....	155
The Critical Ego.....	158
Love and Loss	163

Flight from Freedom	171
Self as a Citadel	179
Chapter Four: Love: An Unsettling Comportment of Receptive Autonomy	187
A Refusal	190
Psychoanalysis: A Practice of Discontent.....	191
Dissent in Baltimore	201
Creative Maladjustment.....	209
The Impossible.....	212
The Force of Love	224
Conclusion.....	232
References	241

Introduction: Resurrecting Autonomy

Critical political theorists regularly dismiss the concept of autonomy as a relic of liberalism. Autonomy, they suggest, the very notion that one might think, act, or live in a self-determined way, is a fantasy of individualism, a belief in self-sovereignty that denies the complex and relational quality of existence.¹ Certainly, autonomy idealized as a state of non-dependence supports a liberal ideology resistant to feminist and progressive political projects intended to foster networks of care and social support. Critics of liberalism rightly claim that liberal systems of political thought that proffer a notion of autonomy have been historically inimical to those ill-suited to embody an ideal self-reliant subject position. However, the idea of autonomy, the idea of “self” “law,” encompasses a rich field of signification—of social critique, collective sovereignty, and anti-authoritarianism—that exceeds the liberal paradigm that has claimed the concept of autonomy as its own.

I contend that there is still political value in the idea of a self-directed mode of being. I return to the concept of autonomy from the perspective of psychoanalysis to contest critical political theory’s dismissal of the idea. Defining autonomy as a solely liberal ideal

¹ In this line of thought, Judith Butler argues that most ideas of autonomy inspire strivings for mastery in the face of exposure and uncertainty. She contends that we should remain wary of liberal ideals of autonomy because they belie the vulnerability of the social-self and encourage defensive and violent reactions to otherness (Butler 2004b, 17-39). Theorists like William Connolly (2010), Samantha Frost, and Diana Coole (2010) stress the problematic political implications of assuming human agency as self-sufficient and superior to other agential forces. Patchen Markell approaches the problem of autonomy through a critique of Hegel’s concept of recognition. Markell suggests that recognition, when seen as a route to autonomous selfhood, reinforces an understanding of the self as sovereign, despite the concept of recognition’s apparent connotation of sociability and mutuality (2003). In general, contemporary critical theorists’ engagement with the notion of autonomy consists mostly of critique, if not dismissal. However, as I will convey, the liberal formulation of autonomy, reliant as it is on a particular understanding of the self, figures just one vision of what autonomy might entail.

cedes the theoretical discussion of a politically significant concept to an ideology historically ambivalent to the aims of the political left. The dominance of liberal theories of autonomy and the correlative rejection of these theories in critical political thought leaves little room for the conceptualization of autonomy in non-liberal terms. This presents a problem for the social possibility of autonomy, because, as I will show, central components of liberal autonomy—self-determination, negative freedom, and rational choice—undermine the self’s actual autonomy, its ability to think and act in a self-directed way. Confounding the problem, as I have suggested, theorists critical of liberalism tend to conflate liberal subjectivity and autonomy and, accordingly, to dismiss the concept of autonomy in its entirety. As a result, worthwhile aspects of autonomy remain under-theorized in non-liberal thought and notions of liberal autonomy continue to predominate.

Consequently, to prevent the premature dismissal of autonomy by critical political thought, and to avoid leaving the signification of autonomy in the hands of those who would deny the self’s socially-embedded, embodied, and receptive nature, I turn to the complex and corporeal self of psychoanalysis to give substance to a distinctive notion of “receptive autonomy.” Receptive autonomy comes into being through vulnerability, dependence, and relationality, the very conditions that are said to compromise the autonomy of liberal subjects. Instead of viewing relationality and emotionality as hindrances to autonomy, I argue that such conditions enable an ethical comportment of receptive autonomy, a heightened capacity for social critique and the creative alteration of the social world in which the self exists.

Psychoanalytic theory helps to elucidate the paradoxical nature of liberal autonomy—that the very ideals associated with autonomy in its liberal form work against

the social realization of autonomy defined loosely as a capacity for self-direction.

Psychoanalysis clarifies how liberal conceptualizations of autonomy propagate cultural norms of defensiveness and anti-relational values that prohibit the openness and social support necessary for receptive autonomy, a comportment of self-direction, social critique, and creativity. In giving substance to a notion of receptive autonomy, I work to retain the crucial political value of an ethical capacity for self-direction, while upending the notion that theorizations of autonomy must inherently draw from limiting conceptions of the self as atomistic or non-dependent.

I turn to psychoanalysis and feminist psychoanalysis to conceptualize receptive autonomy because both strains of thought work to undermine fundamental liberal attributes of subject-hood and agency: subjectivity as implicitly masculine, abstract, and rational, and agency as willful, non-dependent, and self-contained. I show how psychoanalytic and feminist theories produce accounts of selfhood and agency opposed to liberal visions of subjectivity and agency. Through the work of psychoanalytic theorists Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, Jessica Benjamin, and Joan Copjec, I specify how receptive autonomy does not emerge through a denial of dependency and otherness, but rather requires an openness to the interdependencies and uncertainties that accompany relationality. The indecipherable attributes of relationality alert the self to the potentialities lying behind given social possibilities and thus encourage a critical stance toward the social status quo and the creation of innovative self-derived ways of being. Looking to the contributions of Lacanian psychoanalysis, I consider the psyche as never fully self-transparent or wholly determined by social convention, factors which allow for the possibility of a critical and creative mediation of social meaning. Engaging with feminist

and psychoanalytic works, I develop my account of autonomy as a political-ethical corrective to liberal notions of autonomy that tend to discourage critical thought and creative political engagement.

In addition to working to resignify autonomy and to destabilize the liberal idea of autonomy, I aim to demonstrate the ethical-political worth of reading psychoanalysis as a form of critical political theory. Since its inception, psychoanalysis has functioned both as a support for normative configurations of liberal western subjectivity and as an impetus for their decline and reconfiguration. Freud's work displays this ambiguity. Along with his conceptualization of the individual as undone by the unconscious, and external, libidinal, and aggressive forces, Freud proposes attempts to train these entities and energies to respond to reason and other modes of psychic control.^{2, 3} While Freud developed psychoanalysis as a means to address the woes of the liberal subject, he also exposed the great social efforts that had to be extended to achieve the supposedly natural state of the modern civilized individual (Freud 2010). Because his work so plainly exposes the liberal individual as a product of socialization and as always afflicted by internal and external threats to its pretense of self-sovereignty, Freud's contributions to the theorization of political subjectivity extend far beyond a simplistic cultural reinforcement of liberalism's ideal individual.

² Prominent readings of Freud as a politically relevant thinker tend to emphasize the ego-strengthening aspects of his theory and to tie them to Freud's commitment to Enlightenment thinking and liberalism. Historians Paul Roazen and Eli Zaretsky both find in Freud's work a theoretical link between human freedom and rational self-mastery and self-development. (Roazen 1968, 295; Zaretsky 2015, 145). While they both point out Freud's liberalism, they also note the ways in which psychoanalysis challenged liberalism's faith in reason and civilizational progress. (Roazen 1968, 248-9; Zaretsky 2015, 145).

³ In his survey of political theory and human psychology, Franz Alexander suggests that political theorists have yet to conceive of a way to allow for a healthy tension between the two principle inclinations of human nature—volatile sometimes anti-social tendencies and loving and compassionate ones (1942).

Freud's positing of the psyche as a collective of conflicting agencies never fully amenable to reason, self-knowledge, or will-power disrupted the early Victorian era vision of the self as rational and socially malleable (Cushman 1995, 384).⁴ Freud exposed the disturbing underside of the familial bourgeois subject, its existence as an entity beset by aggressive and sexual inclinations, and expedited the cultural move away from a focus on the family and the communal to a focus on the individual and the personal (Graller 2001). As historian Eli Zaretsky suggests, during this period of social transition, "personal identity became a problem and project for individuals as opposed to something given to them by their place in the family or community" (Zaretsky 2015, 20-1). Psychoanalysis was a product and propellant of this cultural shift; it "was a theory and practice of this new aspiration for a personal life. Its original historical telos was...the freeing of individuals from unconscious images of authority originally rooted in the family" (Zaretsky 2015, 20-1). Turning away from the idealization of social and familial influence, psychoanalysis introduced the idea of a "personal unconscious" (Zaretsky 2004, 5), a concept that enriched the existing conception of the self with a sense of singularity and inner-richness. Freud's theory of the unconscious postulated that "stimuli that came to the individual from the society or culture were not directly registered but were first dissolved and internally reconstituted in such a way as to give them personal, even idiosyncratic, meanings. Thus, there was no direct or even necessary connection between one's social condition and one's subjectivity" (Zaretsky 2004, 5). In suggesting that the psyche never fully metabolized

⁴ Elaine Hadley describes Victorian-era liberalism as a "practical politics" (2010, 3) that encouraged citizens to conceive of themselves as socially malleable individuals. She describes this way of thinking as "liberal cognition." She states, "by liberal cognition...I mean a wide range of strikingly formalized mental attitudes, what Victorians might call 'frames of mind,' ...Included under this category of cognition are...quite specific techniques of thought production and judgment, such as 'free thought,' reflection, abstraction, logical reasoning, and internal deliberation (Hadley 2010, 9). I discuss many of these facets of liberalism in chapter one.

social norms, Freud developed the basis for the analytic subject's potential autonomy, her potential to resist and refigure the very ways she had been socialized into being.

In keeping with the social and historical trends of his era, Freud's focus on the individual tends to supersede his concern for social custom, giving his work a liberal bent, a bias for the individual's ability for self-direction over the sanctity of traditional familial and communal ties. Freud, like many Jewish intellectuals in late nineteenth century Vienna, self-identified as a liberal, and his belief in the human predisposition toward freedom reveals itself in his work (Gay 1989). Freud wrote of the individual's struggle against collective determination as the foremost dilemma of the modern age. Man, Freud wrote, "will always defend his claim to individual liberty against the will of the group," and the difficulty will be "finding an expedient accommodation—one, that is, that will bring happiness—between this claim of the individual and the cultural claims of the group..." (2010, 73). In his wariness concerning the optimistic portrayal of human nature and of the positive outcome of the individual's struggle for liberation, Freud's views conflicted with the views of his liberal contemporaries. In general, Freud's model of the individual and his thoughts concerning the individual's capacity for freedom deviate significantly from the liberal ideal of the individual as a non-dependent entity of willful agency and as teleologically guaranteed liberation. In contrast to the individual of liberalism, Freud and his followers concern themselves with a multi-agential individual of many relational attachments and aversions with a predisposition to discontent.

The practice of psychoanalysis helps to theorize autonomy as a relationally enabled capacity, rather than a faculty facilitated by analytical distance from cultural norms, because it acknowledges both that social context contributes to the character of the psyche

and that the psyche imprecisely internalizes social conventions. Psychoanalysis aims to help the self grapple with these social conventions in one way or another. In his study of autonomy in psychoanalytic practice, Stephen Mitchell explains how contemporary forms of psychoanalysis facilitate the analysand's capacity for autonomy by means of the relational experience of analysis. He suggests that in analysis, "the patient's autonomy, a particularly psychoanalytic form of autonomy, emerges as the patient absorbs and is increasingly able to reflect on, deconstruct, and reconstruct his analyst's influence" (Mitchell 2014, 25). In the analytic setting, both analyst and analysand co-create habitual relational patterns and unacknowledged affective inheritances with a mind to discern the presence of these modes of being and to consider their potential to either support or undermine sought-after ways of relating to others. Philip Cushman, in his detailed history of psycho-therapy, describes the politically charged nature of this exchange. He claims that "by addressing the motives hidden within the ebb and flow of power in the therapy hour, psycho-therapy implicitly encourages the patient to demystify domination, nostalgia, and regression, and instead value insight, responsibility, and a confrontation with loss" (Cushman 1995, 288). Rather than a method committed to scientific neutrality, contemporary psychoanalytic practice supports an ethics of openness to relationality and loss, as well as a contemplative relationship to one's social identity. Psychoanalysis, as a practice that aims to enrich capacities of social critique and politically-inflected introspection, acts as a relational training ground where one might enhance one's critical awareness of the social patterns and relational repetitions that configure one's sense of oneself and one's place in a political-social matrix. Mitchell contends that "the traditional ideal of autonomy, redefined as an emergent rather than a preexisting property, can be

reconciled with an understanding of the psychoanalytic process as fundamentally dyadic, as requiring the transformation of two people in their engagement with each other” (2014, 26). In psychoanalysis, autonomy exists as a capacity produced only through encounters with others and with the otherness of one’s own thoughts and emotions.

In conceiving of autonomy as a relational and emotive capacity, rather than as a faculty of rational judgment, psychoanalysis supports the theoretical interrogation of the political subject’s agency and capacity for social critique in a way often opposed to, and often critical of, liberal individualism. The political and ethical worth of reading psychoanalysis as political theory derives from its practical commitment to the self’s capacity to question, critique, and resist detrimental communal conventions without subscribing to an image of the individual as non-dependent and in possession of a stable and invulnerable self-identity.

Psychoanalysis operates as a uniquely paradoxical discourse that both supports and undermines social normalization. In practice, analysis often promotes an ideal “normal” as it attempts to “cure” people, to aid in their adaptation to social conventions.⁵ Yet, as a theory and practice designed to explore discontent, to attend to how the self grapples with societal norms, psychoanalysis elucidates the distressing and sometimes pathological effects of attempting to conform to certain social patterns and beliefs. This aspect of psychoanalysis makes it uniquely suited to inspire the reevaluation and possible refusal of societal practices deemed inimical to the self’s desired way of being.

⁵ Cushman describes the cultural reception of this type of adaptive therapy often associated with ego psychology. He states, “The major reason for the popularity of ego psychology, and of course, the major flaw of the movement as far as constructivists are concerned, is that its proponents uncritically accepted the ‘given’ social world without significant question or resistance. The theory proceeded by assuming that it is proper to adapt and conform to cultural norms and social expectations” (1995, 186).

The dual qualities of psychoanalysis as both a regulatory⁶ and a potentially subversive⁷ social discourse mirror the dual qualities of the concept of autonomy. Autonomy remains tied to a liberal culture that works to maintain the social status quo by encouraging a social disavowal of human interdependence, a disavowal that works to prevent the creation of a less hierarchical and more equitable social order. However, autonomy also retains a defiant signification as it alludes to one's ability to resist social laws and create and follow self-derived laws, laws potentially contrary to liberal norms. The ethically antagonistic side of psychoanalysis supports my theorization of autonomy as an ethos of inventive self-directed social critique.

Historically, psychoanalysis has served as both ally and adversary to counter-cultural and revolutionary social movements. Feminists, postcolonial theorists, civil rights activists, and critics of liberal individualism have all drawn strength from the critical intellectual resources of psychoanalytic theory while still decrying the use of psychoanalysis as a support for patriarchy, racism, and egoism, respectively. I turn to these socially subversive deployments of Freud's thought to show how psychoanalysis aids in the questioning of common assumptions about selfhood, individual pathology, and gender, sex, and sexuality and to develop my notion of receptive autonomy as an ethical comportment of productive discontent.

I ally my theoretical approach with the critical psychoanalytic thought of feminists, relational theorists, and opponents of anti-black racism. I look to feminist psychoanalysis to

⁶ Foucault famously describes psychoanalysis's regulatory function in *The History of Sexuality: Volume One* (1978).

⁷ Intellectuals associated with Freudo-Marxism, the Frankfurt School, and, later, the New Left greatly contributed to the use of psychoanalysis as counter-cultural theory. See: (Adorno 1951; Fenichel 1972; Fromm 1976; Marcuse 1966; Reich 1974).

destabilize the notion that autonomy exists only as a quality of the conventionally masculine self-determined subject and engage, specifically, with the work of psychoanalyst Elizabeth Young-Bruehl to show how psychoanalytic theory and practice can work to undermine predominant liberal assumptions about the viability and desirability of conceiving of the ideal subject as a non-dependent individual.⁸ In the last chapter, I draw from the insights of theorists of decolonization such as Frantz Fanon who add to the discipline of psychoanalysis an innovative and crucial emphasis on the social and historical basis of individuals' psychic organizations. As Fanon contends, the pathology of the individual might actually express the individual's betrayal of, or response to, the pathological society in which he exists (Fanon 1967, 188). Fanon's stress on the historical and political nature of the psyche greatly informs my own reading of psychoanalysis as political theory throughout this work.

My consideration of psychoanalysis as a methodology of political theory focuses only on psychoanalytic approaches that I find significantly contribute to my theorization of autonomy. This project provides neither a comprehensive examination of the concept of autonomy in political and feminist thought, nor an overarching study of psychoanalysis's place in political and feminist theory.⁹ I aim to focus on the concept of political autonomy as it is generally understood in contemporary liberal political thought, especially in the work of John Rawls, and as it is critiqued in feminist theory. This interrogation of the liberal

⁸ Psychoanalyst Lynn Layton claims that relationally inflected contemporary psychoanalytic theory, such as the work of Young-Bruehl, "in normalizing dependency and interdependence as part of what it means to be human, and in critiquing versions of autonomy that deny an embeddedness in relation...offers something of a counter-discourse to hegemonic neoliberal discourses" (2013, 77).

⁹ For a study of psychoanalysis as a political theoretical approach, see: (Roazen 1968; Zaretsky 2015).

understanding of autonomy will be limited, so as to devote space for my second task of developing a theory of non-liberal receptive autonomy from a feminist psychoanalytic perspective. I draw from a limited scope of contemporary political theorists and a varied group of psychoanalytic thinkers at the exclusion of others. I have selected the work of theorists I find most relevant to an examination of political autonomy from the perspective of feminist theory. This means that a full history of the complex trajectories and variants of psychoanalysis lies beyond the scope of this project.^{10, 11}

I do not intend to portray psychoanalysis as a unified theory. A wide range of psychoanalytic schools, institutes, and traditions exist, beholden to significantly different theories of the psyche, the self, and relationality. Yet, the followers of Freud I turn to in this work share important theoretical tendencies. They all challenge the primacy of consciousness, rationality, and individualist notions of subjectivity. Despite its many variations, psychoanalysis retains its basis in Freud's distrust of taken-for-granted assumptions about mental life and his avowal of the limits of human reason. Freud suggests that we approach even our most time-honored beliefs with critical discernment. He cautions:

Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perceptions are subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with what is perceived though unknowable, so psycho-analysis warns us not to equate perceptions by means of consciousness with the unconscious mental processes which are their object. Like the physical, the psychical is not necessarily in reality what it appears to us to be (Freud 1915, 171).

¹⁰ Stephen Mitchell and Margaret J. Black provide an overview of the historical evolution of different psychoanalytic approaches and their theoretical conventions (Mitchell and Black 1995).

¹¹ For a detailed history of psychoanalysis, see: (Makari 2008; Zaretsky 2008, 2015).

Psychoanalysis's grounding in Freud's critical yet pragmatic outlook supports my theorization of autonomy as at odds with liberal autonomy in its most rationalist forms. In the work of Freud and feminist Freudians such as Jessica Benjamin and Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, I find a helpful focus on relationality and social nourishment, aspects of which I suggest are central to an ethics of receptive autonomy. Jacques Lacan and Lacanians Joan Copjec, Slavoj Žižek, and Alenka Zupančič emphasize the ethical opportunities created by disruption and difference. In addition, I look to the work of contemporary political theorists Wendy Brown and Nancy Luxon for their innovative turn to Freud to explore psychic configurations of defense, mourning, and melancholy in the history of political thought and in the contemporary political landscape.

I have included work from relational theory, Lacanian theory, and Freudian theory. Yet, I have chosen not to focus on the work produced in Ego, Interpersonal, and Self Psychology, the strains of analytic theory initially most prominent in the American context. I discuss the motive behind this decision in chapter four. By in large, this exclusion relates to these theoretical approaches' emphasis on adaptation and social normalization, tendencies that I find disadvantageous to the advancement of creative social critique.

In the chapters that follow, I disentangle the concept of autonomy from liberal notions of the ideal. I contend that autonomy understood as an ethical approach to otherness, characterized by the capacity for self-direction, critical evaluation, and creative potential, can and should be differentiated from a conceptualization of autonomy as a state of self-determination,¹² a faculty of reason,¹³ or a manner of living in accordance with an

¹² The capacity for moral autonomy is described as a stage of development in Piaget's *The Moral Judgment of the Child*. (1997).

¹³ See chapter one.

authentic self-identity.¹⁴ I invoke a psychoanalytic depiction of the self as an entity emergent within a given socio-historical field as well as psychoanalytically inspired notions of self-direction, critique, and creativity to develop my theory of receptive autonomy.

While Freud conceived of the self as an “individual,” as an entity ideally differentiated from its environment and endowed with a distinct interior world, his vision of the individual departs significantly from the idea of the individual as presented in liberal theory. Rather than an ahistorical pre-given mode of selfhood, the individual of Freudian psychoanalysis potentially emerges as a psychic entity through internalizations of a wider external world. As an entity produced through internalizations of “otherness,” Freud’s individual, while distinct from its environment, retains aspects of the social world within. Because individuation takes place in a particular relational setting, the emergence of the individual from a prior state of oneness with its environment and its subsequent realization of the integrity of its personhood might result in a variety of different psychic-self boundaries, some individuals’ boundaries appearing more distinct than others (Mahler 1975). Certain schools of psychoanalysis entirely decline to think of human development in terms of a process of individuation (Sullivan 1950, 1953).

Although different schools of psychoanalysis conceive of the individual in different ways, psychoanalysis, in general, considers the self, in an individual form or otherwise, as an entity that neither directly mirrors the currents of its socialization nor possesses the ability to abstract itself fully from them. In contrast to theories that suggest that the self

¹⁴ An example of such a perspective is Taylor’s *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991). In this work, he suggests that freedom entails living in accordance with an authentic self.

exists as an entirely socially constructed being and to liberal theories that see the self as capable of inhabiting a place of objective judgment largely removed from social influence, psychoanalysis is unique in its theorization of the self at a point between these two poles.

Interestingly, both liberal theorists and critics of liberalism tend to consider only two opposing views of the self and to relatedly define autonomy (as a reality or as a misapprehension, respectively) as the opposite of dependence. The self is defined either as unified and self-sovereign, as in liberal theory, or as multifaceted and socially constructed, as in much contemporary critical theory. Theorists wary of the humanist vision of the subject tend to think of the idea of a coherent subject as necessarily implying mastery and a repudiation of socialization; they therefore seek to defame the idealization of such a subject.¹⁵ In an overly broad move, theorists suspicious of the idea of the subject as substance¹⁶ often overlook the necessary integrity and materiality of the psyche. They appear to deny that socialized self-identities always fail to determine the whole of the self's being and to reject the notion that self-coherence might be a good rather than a deterrent.¹⁷ In distinct contrast to this turn away from the subject in critical theory, liberal theorists continue to express a faithfulness to the idea of a unified and rational subject.

¹⁵ James Heartfield (2006), Jacob Rogozinski (2010), and Slavoj Žižek (1999) interrogate the contemporary theoretical turn away from the subject and examine the politically detrimental implications of this philosophical shift.

¹⁶ The now widespread critique of the idea of an essence or pre-given form of subjectivity can be traced back to the critique of the subject found in the works of Fredrick Nietzsche and Michel Foucault.

¹⁷ Mari Ruti gives a psychoanalytic account of the medial agential nature of the self in opposition to Foucauldian and Butlerian tendencies, which she suggests conflate the self with the subject and see the social as fully determining the self (Ruti 2014; 2006). My account agrees with these contentions, but additionally emphasizes the importance of the social context (nurturing, denying, or otherwise) in determining the self's agential capacities. My account also emphasizes the importance of the self's relation to the frequently upsetting quality of its vulnerability to others and to its environment.

This two-sided deliberation about subjectivity between feminists, critical theorists, and liberal theorists spills over into related discussions about the merit and achievability of autonomy. If the “auto,” the self, must be understood as either entirely socially constructed or as analytically distinct from its social-historical context, the concept of “autonomy,” self-law, must describe either an impossibility, as the subject exists as being wholly constructed by the laws of others, or it must name a faculty of a self-aware rational subject, imbued with the capacity to objectively evaluate the laws of others. This dichotomous thinking structures theoretical considerations of both subjectivity and autonomy.

Feminist theorist Jane Flax describes the divided discourse on the qualities of subjectivity in detail and suggests that psychoanalysis offers a way to navigate between these two visions of the subject as either wholly socially determined or as atomistic and self-determined (Flax 1990). Although she seeks to avoid either extreme, she ultimately concludes, as I do, that the contemporary philosophical trend of dismantling the integrity of the subject errs in its tendency to overlook the psychic coherence required for critical political agency.

Flax suggests that postmodern thinkers like Derrida and Foucault—I would add some contemporary theorists indebted to their work—appear too habituated to a dualistic mode of thinking about the self, as either constructed or given, to realize the important distinction between a coherent self and an essential true self (Flax 1990, 210). Theories based on a notion of a coherent self, such as psychoanalytic ones, do not necessarily discount socialization; nor, as I have explained, do they assume any kind of agential selfhood as a given. Psychoanalysis focuses on processes of “self-formation (e.g., early mother-child relations, the sexual division of labor in child rearing)” (Flax 1990, 210) to a

much greater degree than those theorists who profess “to see the self and concepts of it as socially and historically constituted” (Flax 1990, 210). Psychoanalysis assumes neither a pre-given nor a purely discursively constructed self, but rather attends closely and carefully to the very social and relational patterns that give shape to historically specific modes of selfhood.

Feminist psychoanalysis looks to the ways in which popular understandings of the self have very real consequences for social agency. Even though normative views about selfhood reflect liberal ideals of individualism and self-determination, these views, contrary to what some thinkers critical of liberalism might suggest, are not wholly unfounded. Flax states that those who insist on the self’s total social construction, “those who celebrate or call for a ‘decentered’ self seem self-deceptively naïve and unaware of the basic cohesion within themselves that makes fragmentation of experiences something other than a terrifying slide into psychosis” (1990, 219). Moreover, Flax expresses my own concern about the contemporary theoretical elision of selfhood; I too, am “suspicious of the motives of those who would counsel such a position at the same time as women have just begun to re-member their selves and to claim an agentic subjectivity available always before only to a few privileged white men” (1990, 220). While I share this view, I do not discount the worth of the Foucauldian de-centering of the subject and its implications for thinking beyond the abstract subject of liberal thought. Only, I find that because feminist psychoanalysis focuses on the self’s formation in the context of micro political practices such as the reproduction of social patterns of affect and intimacy, practices often

overlooked by macro-focused theories, it more adequately supports my theorization of selfhood and autonomy as based in relationality.¹⁸

Philosopher Susan Brison writes of the importance of keeping a notion of selfhood alive for feminist theory. Brison recounts her experience of being sexually assaulted and describes her recovery from post-traumatic stress-disorder as a matter of self-reconstruction through personal narrative (Brison 2002). Emphasizing the relational nature of selfhood, Brison describes her need for the responsiveness of others during her time of recovery. Her narrative underscores the value of a notion of selfhood—how the idea of the self as a coherent agent should not simply be dismissed as a symptom of liberal ideology but should be explored as a potentially vital locus of political agency. One can neither think nor act to challenge and transform the social world in which one exists when impinged upon by violence and the traumatic imprints it leaves in its wake. Brison writes of the “autonomy-undermining symptoms of PTSD:”

...not only is one's response to items that would startle anyone heightened, but one has an involuntary startle response to things that formerly provoked no reaction or a subtler, still voluntary one. The loss of control evidenced by these and other PTSD symptoms alters who one is, not only in that it limits what one can do (and can refrain from doing), but also in that it changes what one *wants* to do. A trauma survivor suffers a loss of control not only over herself, but also over her environment, and this, in turn, can lead to a constriction of the boundaries of her will (2002, 86).

Brison's emphasis on the ways in which we can be violated and undone by others is matched with an attentiveness to our need for mutually enriching relations to repair a shattered-self. Theorists who insist on the non-coherence of selfhood deny the degree to

¹⁸ Anne Soler notes that while Foucault theorizes desire as a product and instrument of socialization, he does not discuss the intimate practices and patterns that incite desire. Soler contends that we must amend Foucault's theory of desire to attend to how desire is “educated,” in a colonial context, through racialized and gendered fantasies about native and white bodies, childrearing, and mothering (Soler 1995).

which agency and vitality require a relationally enabled psychic coherence, a coherence that is neither pre-given nor absolute.

While many critical theorists contend that theories of coherent selfhood and of self-directed agency tend to invoke problematic ideals of self-sovereignty and mastery, psychoanalysis refuses the forced choice between the integral self and the vulnerable self. The subject of analysis is neither unified nor atomistic (as in most liberal theory) nor entirely determined by social patterns and signification (as in much critical social theory). Psychoanalysis figures the self as always a product of socialization, yet as never fully circumscribed by social identity or collective meaning. Accordingly, psychoanalysis aids in the theorization of autonomy as a politically significant ethical comportment evocative of a relational and interdependent self.

I extend this psychoanalytic notion of the self to my consideration of what it might mean to take up a comportment of “self-direction.” Through an engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis, I explain how self-direction denotes the subject’s ability to act in defiance of accustomed ways of being by means of an attentiveness to that which remains outside of normative discourse and might appear shocking and “other.”¹⁹ This awareness occurs by means of love. Love unsettles self-other boundaries and consequently the subject’s confidence in the soundness of its social identity. Remaining receptive to the otherness that appears unrepresentable in the terms given to signify experience encourages an awareness

¹⁹ The use of the terms “subject,” “I,” “ego,” and “self” vary across psychoanalysis. However, in general “I” denotes an entity with a conceptual (usually linguistic) understanding of its differentiation from its surroundings. “Ego” connotes a *part* of that same entity which works to maintain this distinction. Yet, the description of the ego differs profoundly between Lacanians and most other followers of Freud, including those in relational psychoanalysis, self-psychology, and ego developmental psychology. I use the term “self” to convey a weaker, yet still present, differential relation between a human being and its world. The Lacanian and Foucauldian use of the term “subject” indicates the self’s indebtedness to a world of otherness, its constitution in social structures of meaning and matter. I use the term “subject” when engaging with Lacanian theory and when speaking directly about the mode in which the self comes to understand its social identity to preserve the significance of the term “subject” as an allusion to the otherness of the self’s reflection upon being.

that normative meaning cannot fully encompass our desire for an alternative to given ways of being. Through a comportment of receptivity, the subject senses the weight of social norms due to the felt presence of something for which they cannot account. This presence is, for Lacan, endemic to the subject's misalignment with the Symbolic and the source of the subject's potential freedom and, I will argue, the subject's central incitement to an autonomous comportment.

In addition to maintaining the self (although a self quite distinct from the liberal self) as a point of departure for my theory of autonomy, I preserve the critical aspect implied in Kant's notion of autonomy—that the self possesses the ability to contest the laws of others by means of a law of its own. I affirm what Foucault calls the Enlightenment's philosophical ethos, an ethos driven by “the principal critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy” (1984, 44). Foucault, alluding to Kant's essay “What is Enlightenment? (1784),” suggests that rather than approach the legacy of the Enlightenment, and by extension Kant's thought, as an inheritance of misguided rationalism, and therefore as something to entirely reject, that we, instead, recognize our ties to the Enlightenment in its ethos of critique. Foucault states “...the thread that may connect us with the Enlightenment is not faithfulness to doctrinal elements, but rather the permanent reactivation of an attitude—that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era” (1984, 42). Foucault's suggestion that Kantian critique might prefigure a contemporary ethos of critique and social transformation parallels my assertion that the ideal of autonomy, if diverted from its liberal trajectory, might serve as a theoretical basis for an ethics of creative discontent.

In keeping with an Enlightenment ethos of critique, I contend that Kant's notion of autonomy demands a much more rigorous critique of given social customs than liberal interpretations of his work would allow. I present a psychoanalytic reading of Kant's notion of autonomy to counter liberal readings of Kantian autonomy, which conceive of autonomy as a systematized process of rational self-reflection on given social laws. This liberal interpretation of Kantian autonomy departs from Kant's commitment to a critique of common and mechanistic modes of thinking. His iconic proclamation obliging us to break free from tutelage does not say: "have courage to use *common* (or even universal) reason!" but rather: "Have courage to use *your own* reason!" [emphasis added] (Kant 1784). Against liberal readings of Kantian autonomy, I suggest that autonomy entails not the self's capacity to follow rationally chosen morals but the self's capacity to break with the morality of the phenomenal world, the morality of the collectively given. In my reading, autonomy involves a critical stance toward common ways of reasoning, normative values, and accepted ways of being.

In order to emphasize the critical potential of psychoanalysis and to show how it relates to the critical aspect of autonomy, I turn to Lacan's figuration of psychoanalysis as a theory and practice attentive to the fractured nature of subjectivity. I draw a parallel between Lacan's focus on disruption—a state of being split between singular existence and a life lived in the language of others—and my notion of an ethics of receptive autonomy, which entails an attentiveness to the indigestible and unruly facets of relationality. I examine how erotic moments of relationality jostle social identities in a manner that opens the self to its own singularity, its disjoint with the laws and mores of others.

I significantly depart from liberal figurations of autonomy with the third element of receptive autonomy, the idea of creative capacity. Drawing upon Hegel's understanding of freedom as dependent upon the self's participation in the social conditions of its existence, I suggest that autonomy entails the capacity for creation. In this claim, I refute the notion that autonomy requires only unhindered rational choice from among given social possibilities. Through a reading of Hegel's notion of freedom as generative participation and of Lacanian ethics as productive of an impossible "choice" (something beyond the given), I argue that autonomy requires the capacity to *create* aspects of one's own social existence. Receptive autonomy entails not only the capacity to critique the laws of others but also the capacity to create laws of one's own.

This project first gives a general sketch of the relationship between liberalism and autonomy to highlight the ways in which liberalism has gained ascendancy over the theoretical representation of autonomy. Contrary to the somewhat common assumption that autonomy has always been a primarily liberal concept, I contend the liberal theorist John Rawls has played a significant role in establishing the ostensibly natural link between Kantian autonomy and liberal ideals. Against Rawls's reading of Kantian autonomy, I give a psychoanalytic reading of Kant's concept of autonomy through Lacanian interpretations of Kant's moral theory. This initial psychoanalytic interpretation of Kantian autonomy provides a basis for my subsequent engagement with the work of various schools of psychoanalysis as a means to develop my theory of an ethics of receptive autonomy.

In chapter one, I begin with an overview of liberal readings of Kantian autonomy that define autonomy as one's capacity to rationally select which social values to adopt as one's own. I focus specifically on John Rawls's influential work, *A Theory of Justice*, as

representative of the ways in which liberal theorists read Kant to further specific liberal principles such as inherent human equality, the importance of negative liberty, and confidence in willful and rational human agency. I contend that Rawls's and other liberal readings of Kant disregard the more radical aspects of Kant's theory of autonomy—his contention concerning the transcendental nature of freedom and his critique of empiricism as a basis for morality. I draw a parallel between Kant's assertion that freedom remains beyond the limits of the empirical and Lacan's claim that ethical action entails a rejection of "what is." While Rawls and other liberals focus on Kant's idea that a form of common reason might provide a basis for autonomy, I suggest, through Lacanian readings of Kant, that autonomy entails a disregard for held-in-common principles and an attentiveness to one's singular form of alienation from a field of common meaning.

My portrayal of autonomy draws from Lacan's contention that the subject's potential freedom lies in its desire. I describe the subject's desire as a sense that a disjuncture exists between socially representable possibilities (all that is representable in a given field of meaning) and all that could be other than it is. I draw out the subtle correspondence between Lacan's idea of ethics and Kant's theory of morality and suggest that both theories imply the driven quality of an autonomous comportment. For Lacan, ethical action follows the path of desire, one's longing for an otherwise, and for Kant, autonomy comes to the subject as an "ought," as an awareness that one could, in fact, act in opposition to all the ways one might choose to act as a being of instinct and interest. In contrast to Lacanian readings of Kant and my own interpretation of Kant's theory of autonomy, liberal interpretations of Kantian autonomy, in their emphasis on rational choice-making, self-determination, and objectivity, define the given social world as the

grounds for the realization of autonomy. This theoretical adherence to the status quo, when culturally disseminated in liberal ideology, encourages a general avoidance of deviations from common social patterns and beliefs—of potentially productive moments of self-disruption, moments which, I argue, provide for an affective environment in which one might come to inhabit a comportment of receptive autonomy.

Chapter two delves into Lacan's theory of the subject and the subject's desire in greater detail. I start with an explanation of Lacan's notion of the subject as alienated from collective signification and then turn to his related portrayal of ethics as the duty to follow one's desire. Lacan's alienated subject and its capacity to ethically follow its desire act as points of departure for my theorization of autonomy as characterized by a break with normative social law and the potential for the creation of something, or some way of being, previously unimaginable within the dominant social order. In this chapter, I also examine the significance of the affects involved in an ethics of receptive autonomy through the work of Joan Copjec, who provides a feminist reading of Lacan's ethics. Copjec's theory of love as linked to an ethics of social refusal supports my theory of receptive autonomy as a comportment of ethical openness to the disruptive qualities of love and, more generally, of relationality. I explain how in opening to the uncertainty of proximity to otherness, the self grows more aware of its contours and of its potential to engage critically and creatively with the social world in which it exists. From these considerations of love and ethics, I give shape to my theory of an ethics of receptive autonomy. I describe this ethical comportment as an openness to the inarticulable aspects of being that become more apparent in loving encounters, encounters which intensify the subject's desire for something beyond the merely socially possible.

In chapter three, reading through Freud, Jessica Benjamin, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, and Jonathan Lear, I survey the reciprocal currents of affection conducive to an autonomous comportment. I look to the work of Freud and his followers in relational theory to clarify how a socialized denial of conditions of vulnerability and dependency in favor of a defensive approach to these conditions shrinks the self's capacity to inhabit a critical position with respect to possibly detrimental social norms. Examining liberal notions of autonomy as part of an American cultural resistance to dependency, I elaborate on the ways in which liberal modes of thought produce social norms that encourage resistance to the openness necessary for critical and creative self-direction. While not denying the significant worth of the Lacanian position, in its emphasis on subversion and social critique, in this chapter, I insist upon the important role of the other, the social, the milieu, and thus of nourishment in determining the self's capacity to take up an autonomous comportment. Retaining both an emphasis on resistance and receptivity, I highlight the import of Lacanian negativity and of relational-oriented reparation for my theory of autonomy. I demonstrate how an ethos of social critique and an openness to deep relationality, rather than modes of being at odds with each other, require and reinforce one another.

I elaborate further on the pathways that lead to receptive autonomy and expand upon the facets of this ethical comportment in chapter four. I look to the 2015 uprising in West Baltimore, following the death of Freddie Gray, as an exemplar of an ethics of receptive autonomy. Turning to Martin Luther King Jr.'s address to the American Psychological Association in 1967, I extend his notion of "creative maladjustment" to describe the aspects of refusal and creativity implied in receptive autonomy as an ethics of

creative discontent. Through King's notion of creative maladjustment and Freud's understanding of social discontent as well as Alenka Zupančič's portrayal of the subversive effects of the analytic encounter, I present a reading of the Baltimore uprising as an enactment of productive social refusal allied with the imaginative and disruptive facets of psychoanalysis. I argue that, as productively "maladjusted" actors, the Baltimore protesters and rioters, in an act that might appear as self-sabotage from the point of view of normative American society, have actually significantly unsettled and possibly altered the social status quo that structures their dispossession. I contest the mainstream media's representation of the riots as counterproductive and as motivated only by futile anger and a gratuitous desire for commodities. Instead, I suggest that the riots might be read as expressive of a kind of ethical and erotic free fall—a disaffection from a pathologically racist society. Deepening chapter two's engagement with a psychoanalytic account of love, I cite several people involved in the uprising and contend that their statements might be read as indicative of a loving commitment to expanding the realizability of their lives and their community members' lives beyond the confines of the socially impossible. Through this discussion of the recent events in Baltimore, I articulate how an ethics of receptive autonomy, an ethics charged with the affective energy of love, might enable creative political action that could produce radical and lasting societal change.

In conclusion, I outline how my theorization of autonomy works to shift the theoretical political discourse surrounding political agency and subjectivity to include a space for the consideration of a self-directed relational ethos. I maintain the worth of thinking through what it might mean to express autonomy by attending to valuable aspects of autonomy, the capacity for self direction, critical evaluation, and creativity. As

exemplified in my reading of the Baltimore riots, the value of these aspects of autonomy lies in how they enable the possibility of radical social-political change. In presenting an account of an ethics of receptive autonomy and what I view as its positive political implications, I offer an alternative to the normative liberal vision of autonomy, which as I explain throughout, works against the realizability of an ethics of creative discontent.

I introduce an ethical-political comportment intended to encourage a distinctive response to human interdependence and mutual vulnerability. The self poised in a receptive and loving way might come to a critical awareness that liberalism predisposes subjects to seek shelter in moments of relationality and inevitable vulnerability and come to reflect upon this tendency as something quite different from its wished-for way of relating to others and otherness. In this scenario, a posture of autonomy would serve to disrupt liberal ideology, autonomy's presumed ideological basis. It is with this internal critique of autonomy in mind that I turn to psychoanalysis to resurrect autonomy and free the concept from its grounds in liberal theory.

Chapter One: The Autonomous Subject and Psychoanalysis

Liberal theorists frequently cite Kant's notion of autonomy as a starting-point for the theorization of self-determined political agency. These thinkers tend to converge on several key assumptions that they claim to derive directly from Kant's notion of moral autonomy. Liberal accounts of autonomy generally presuppose the normative value of free-choice, the human faculty of rational reflection, and ideals of political equality and harmony. Feminists, Marxists, and communitarians, among others, have critiqued these supposedly Kantian fundamentals for what they see as the problematic social implications of an idealization of individualism and rationalism. Although I share these concerns about the perniciousness of many ideals of liberalism, I do not think theorists critical of the liberal tradition should dismiss the concept of autonomy altogether. I revisit the notion of autonomy and take it in a non-liberal ethical direction to revive the socially valuable potential of an idea of self-directed comportment.

My articulation of what I call "an ethical comportment of receptive autonomy" draws largely from psychoanalysis, which serves as a productive conceptual field for thinking beyond the dependency/autonomy dichotomy that haunts the thinking of both liberals and their critics on questions of autonomy. Psychoanalysis refuses the forced choice between vulnerability and agency and instead demonstrates how sensitivity to relational interdependence enriches our potential to inhabit a comportment of autonomy. I draw from a psychoanalytic understanding of human dispositions, as produced in relation

to certain climates of social expectation and ways of relating, to theorize autonomy as an ethical comportment rather than a presupposed universal faculty of rational agents.²⁰ In opposition to liberal theorists, who, as I will show, figure autonomy as either freedom from others or as the rational selection of beliefs and customs on the basis of their appropriate fit with an identifiable unified-self, I define autonomy as an ethical approach to otherness that allows one to intuit the lack of a perfect fit with social identity and to refuse normative social options in the interest of generating new political possibilities.

In what follows, I return to Kant's theory of autonomy to establish the differences between my psychoanalytic reading of autonomy and liberal theory's general characterization of Kantian autonomy. Whereas liberal theorists like John Rawls portray autonomy as a faculty of self-determination (the effects of autonomy remain within the relatively immediate realm of the individual) and the ability to rationally choose from among socially recognized options, I figure autonomy as a comportment of self-direction (possibly disruptive of the wider social network in which the self exists), social critique, and the *creation* of choice. I challenge liberal notions of autonomy, which I will show forestall the capacities I associate with autonomy, while remaining committed to thinking about ways to foster modes of self-directed social critique.

Standard liberal accounts of autonomy as well as feminist critiques of liberal autonomy tend to portray autonomy as a faculty of an individualized, non-dependent, and rational agent. Such an agent is imbued with the ability to reason abstractly about social norms and values and to act as both supporter and critic of the social world in which it

²⁰ In her work to decouple subjectivity from individuality, Jodi Dean notes that liberal theory envisions subjects' capacities as "cut off from the settings that produce and enable them and enclosed with the individual" (2016, 365).

exists. This ideal agent appears as something like an autonomous choice-maker, set up against the social, even if it is acknowledged as a product of socialization.

This idea of autonomy, as a faculty of an analytically isolatable individual to choose rationally from among given social possibilities, is often attributed to Kant (Hill 1984).²¹ Yet, the continuity between this contemporary liberal understanding of autonomy and Kant's notion of autonomy does not appear entirely solid.^{22, 23} In fact, none of the better-known contemporary liberal accounts of autonomy include what I find to be the most radical aspect of Kant's theory of autonomy, his gesture to a break with the empirically given. I draw out this tendency in Kant's thought, through Lacanian readings of Kantian ethics, to support the development of my own theory of receptive autonomy.²⁴

This chapter first discusses liberal interpretations of Kantian autonomy focusing mostly on the work of John Rawls. Subsequently, I consider feminist critiques and reformations of liberal autonomy. I show how both liberal theorists of autonomy and their feminists critics tend to assume an antithetical relationship between autonomy and dependence and thus give short shrift to the receptivity that autonomy as an ethical comportment entails. Following this assessment of autonomy in its liberal figuration and

²¹ Gerald F. Gaus contends that liberalism expresses a commitment to a "Kantian' conception of moral autonomy" (2005, 272) and presupposes political agents' possession of moral autonomy.

²² Gabriela Bastera reads Kant through Levinas to suggest that alterity exists at the heart of Kant's theory of autonomy (2015). In this sense, Kantian autonomy would not support an idea of the subject as atomistic or self-standing.

²³ Responding to Charles Larimore's criticism of Kantian autonomy as egoistic, Katerina Deligiorgi suggests that "the charge of individualism is not applicable to Kant's conception of autonomy," (2012, vi) but rather applies more aptly to other predominant psychological notions of autonomy. I believe that these latter accounts include those of liberal theorists John Rawls, John Christman, Gerald Dworkin, and Michael Freedman.

²⁴ I aim to draw out certain strains in Kant's theory of autonomy that have been subsumed by more common liberal interpretations. In this sense my project aligns with Kimberly Hutchings's work, which centers on the strong "Kantian legacy within social and political theory that identifies itself as explicitly critical of the liberal mainstream in both theory and practice" (2013, 6).

responding critiques, I look back to the notion of autonomy through psychoanalytically inspired readings of Kant's ethical theory in the work of Jacques Lacan and his followers. From these readings of Kantian ethics, I begin to develop my concept of a comportment or ethics of receptive autonomy as a conceptual corrective to liberal autonomy. In the chapters that follow this one, I flesh out the connection between Lacanian theory and my own understanding of autonomy, as well as take the concept in a more general psychoanalytic direction.

Liberal Autonomy

Political and legal philosophers, working within the tradition of liberalism, dominate contemporary theoretical discussions concerning the nature of autonomy. In such works, the term "autonomy" frequently stands in for one of several related philosophical concepts ranging from liberty or freedom to rational capacity or maturity. While such theories diverge in their relative emphasis of different components of autonomy, they share fundamental assumptions about the rationality and unity of ideal political subjects. Liberal theorists defend a conception of autonomy as the ability to rationally choose an authentic life course. According to liberal theorist Gerald Dworkin, the capacity for free-choice, "the condition of being a chooser (where one's choices are not defined by the threats of another)" (18, 1988) forms the basis for almost all contemporary liberal accounts of autonomy. John Rawls (1971) and Thomas E. Hill (1984) add to this idea of free-choice the

necessity that these choices be rational in Kantian terms, that is, consistent with a belief in the universalizable nature of rationally derived choices.

Liberal theorists like John Christman (1989) and Hill (1984) suggest that their theories, which assume the faculty of rational free-choice and the condition of non-alienation, derive from Kant's theory of autonomy. Hill contends, "...Most, if not all, recent conceptions of autonomy have roots in Kant's writing" (1984, 254-5). While elements of rationalism and authenticity certainly appear in Kant's theory, they do not comprise the entirety of his idea of autonomy.

Liberal renderings of Kantian autonomy tend to focus on Kant's positing of the categorical imperative as a basis for rationally derived autonomous judgments. Kant's categorical imperative requires that "one must be able to will that a maxim of our action should become a universal law" (2002, 41). Only judgments that meet the requirements of universalizability qualify as rational. Such rational judgments, Kant contends, remain free from determination by social codes, authorities, and inclinations, in that they follow an internally given universal law of reason (Kant 2002, 49). Kant emphasizes that this law of reason must be *universal* because, "for reason to give law it is required that reason need presuppose only itself, because the rule is objectively and universally valid only when it holds without any contingent subjective conditions which differentiate one rational being from another" (1993, 19). Because a universal law of reason, a law grounding the free will, must be "independent of all empirical conditions (i.e., those belonging to the world of sense)" (Kant 1993, 29), the law must exist as a purely formal law independent of its potential material content. Liberal thinkers like Rawls and Hill focus on the objective character of Kant's law of reason to ground their theories of autonomy and shy away from

his intrinsically related contention that judgments motivated by any empirical object remain pathological and heteronomous rather than autonomous; such judgments fail to comply with a *universal*, purely formal, law of reason.

Liberals deduce from Kant's categorical imperative that autonomy demands a certain capacity to act in accordance with a universalizable law of reason. Yet, they depart from Kant's law of reason by proposing that one can determine which actions, choices, and beliefs express autonomy, and consequently that a society can act to increase the obtainability of autonomously derived choices by arranging its institutions according to a universal "law of reason." Hill states, "a theory of autonomy following Kant, Rawls, and others, would first define principles for moral institutions and personal interactions, leaving each person, within these constraints, the freedom to choose and pursue whatever ends they will" (1984, 266). In defining a set of empirical conditions under which rational deliberation should take place, liberal thinkers like Rawls and Hill seek to avoid Kant's metaphysical inclinations; in the process, they give content to Kant's *formal* law of reason.²⁵

As I will show, liberals, in their enthusiasm for Kant's stipulations concerning rational choice, miss the more radical postulate in Kant's notion of autonomy—his contention that the moral law comes to us only as an imperative, as an unconditional demand that we *ought* to do otherwise, that we are in fact capable of acting contrary to our immediate desires and inclinations. Kant contends "All imperatives are expressed through an ought and thereby indicate the relation of an objective law of reason to a will which in

²⁵ Hill describes some of Kant's central contentions, such as his belief that "that a person's commitment to moral principles does not take place in space or time and is incapable of empirical explanation," as "unacceptable features" of Kant's theory (1984, 255-56). Hill argues that such "fundamental features of Kant's theory are notoriously embedded in a metaphysical framework and surrounded by specific moral opinions, which most philosophers today, quite rightly, reject" (1984, 255-56).

its subjective constitution is not necessarily determined by that law..." (2003, 30). The will is free to go with or against the imperative, but as Kant suggests, the moral path follows this imperative to do "otherwise," to act contrary to our routine and habitual ways of being.

As an imperative oriented toward a beyond, moral law cannot be realized within the confines of the empirical here and now. Kant contends, "everything that is empirical is, as a contribution toward the principle of morality, not only entirely unfit for it, but even highly disadvantageous to the purity of morals themselves (Kant 2002, 43). Kant's rejection of empirical motivations as the basis for morality leads him to propose that we could only every imagine meeting the demands of moral law by assuming the immortality of the human soul, the possibility of transcendence beyond the empirical world (Kant 1993, 139). While Kant's supposition of immortality as the only means to pure morality has led some to characterize Kant as a moralizer, intent on avowing human unworthiness, I will show how his postulate of immortality, as a rejection of empirical determination, forms the basis for a socially subversive form of autonomy as imagined in Lacanian readings of his ethics.

From a liberal perspective, autonomy also requires that rationally-made empirical choices be assimilated or recognized by an actor as "his own." Joel Feinberg states that a person is autonomous to the degree that "his tastes, opinions, ideals, goals, values, and preferences are all authentically *his*" (32, 1989). This means that one has arrived at one's choice in values through a universal faculty of rational reflection, rather than through the immediate adoption of others' beliefs, and that one can subsequently identify such values as one's own. "A person is autonomous," Dworkin asserts, "if he identifies with his desires, goals, and values, and such identification is not itself influenced in ways which make the process of identification in some way alien to the individual" (61, 1989). Autonomy then,

according to most philosophers known for their work on the concept, presupposes the faculty for rational reflection and for the identification of an authentic core self.

Liberal theorists, like Hill, drain Kant's moral theory of its radical potential by rejecting his stipulations about the limited nature of empirical knowledge, while overstating the theoretical importance of his faith in reason. Liberal presuppositions about the subject as atomistic, non-dependent, and willful color such readings of Kantian autonomy and work to emphasize a certain hubris of human reason lurking within Kant's theory of morality. In contrast, as I will show, Lacanian interpretations of Kant discover in his ethics an insistence on the *creation of a choice* rather than mere rational free choice and on self-disruption over the goal of self-unity.

Given my intent to concentrate in this chapter on the problem of autonomy as presented in liberal interpretations of Kant's ethics, I focus primarily on the notion of autonomy as it is presented in the work of one well-known twentieth century liberal philosopher. In his early work, John Rawls shows an equal commitment to Kant, autonomy, and social contract theory.²⁶ For this reason, his work reveals the manner in which liberal theories adapt Kantian autonomy and conceptions of autonomy more generally to justify liberal presuppositions.²⁷

²⁶ As Geuss notes, liberal theorists have not been historically partial to Kant, given what they view as his absolutist theological tendencies. Rather, Rawls appears responsible for a revisionist interpretation of Kant's importance as a philosopher of liberalism. Geuss states, "Rawls's work had the curious effect of advancing Kant to the position of a patron saint of liberalism. This is mildly paradoxical, because Kant had been seen for most of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the main philosophic proponents of liberalism (Constant, J.S. Mill, I. Berlin; also Bentham and Dewey) as an arch anti-liberal" (2002, 325).

²⁷ As Hutchings states, "Rawls draws upon Kant's moral philosophy to underpin a particular vision of the just society. In doing this, Rawls neither acknowledges the radical ambiguities of Kant's attempts to legitimate the claims of reason in theory and practice, nor seriously challenges the presumptions of liberal social democracy..." (2013, 6).

Kant with Rawls

In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls seeks to revivify social contract theory and defend liberal principles to challenge the predominance of utilitarian theories of justice (1971). In this influential work, Rawls aims to combine a Kantian understanding of autonomy with social contract theory and liberal principles of primary equality and the priority of freedom. He proposes to recreate the conditions of the “state of nature,” as depicted in social contract theory, by imagining an “original position” wherein ideal subjects behind a “veil of ignorance” are tasked with reaching fundamental agreements for the establishment of a just society (Rawls 1971, 11). Behind this veil, “no one knows his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like” (Rawls 1971, 11). The ideals chosen then, would be fair to all, given that no rational person in such a position would agree to conditions that might be disadvantageous to anyone on the basis of a particularity of their person or their social position.²⁸

Rawls claims that his metaphorical recreation of the social contract would result in the establishment of two principles meant to balance the priority of liberty with the value of equality. The first principle of justice states that “each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others” (Rawls 1971, 53). The second advises, “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are to be of the greatest benefit to the least-advantaged members of society” (Rawls 1971, 53). The first principle establishes that citizens should be allowed as much freedom as

²⁸ Susan Moller Okin points out that, at least initially, Rawls does not include “sex” as one of the particularities of the subject that is to be excluded from consideration in the original position. She sees this as indicative of Rawls’s blindness to the “sexism of the tradition” (Okin 1989a, 91) from which he draws.

possible within the bounds of a respect for others' freedom. The second states that citizens should have equal access to social goods (primary goods) that enable the exercise of personal freedom and that potential inequalities should be compensated for in a manner acceptable to the least privileged members of society.

In proposing these two principles of justice as appropriate for the ideal society, Rawls claims to draw from Kant's categorical imperative and his related understanding of autonomy. For Rawls, the veil of ignorance, which "deprives the persons in the original position of the knowledge that would enable them to choose heteronomous principles" (1971, 222), acts as a guarantee that the two principles are arrived at autonomously, that they are not based on a person's particular "social position, or natural endowments, or in view of the particular kind of society in which he lives, or the specific things he happens to want" (Rawls 1971, 222). Rawls contends that Kant's categorical imperative pertains to both of the principles of justice he proposes.

The original position models the conditions and constraints of Kant's categorical imperative, which stipulates, "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become universal law" (Kant 2002, 37). Rawls suggests that the principles derived from the procedural of the original position mirror those that would result in consideration from the vantage point of the categorical imperative. Rawls's principles would be chosen based only on the knowledge that all participants in the original position recognize their shared status as equal and rational beings, that any decisions arrived at would equally advantage or disadvantage all players. Relying on no particular or contingent forms of knowledge, only on a fundamental affirmation of human equality and rationality, these principles are "based on Kant's notion of autonomy" (Rawls

1971, 221). In describing the original position as a procedural model of Kant's categorical imperative, Rawls claims to ground his theory of justice in a Kantian understanding of autonomy.

In fact, as I will show, Rawls's particular liberal reading of Kant disregards Kant's contention that empirically based reason cannot serve as a grounds for the autonomy of the will. In modeling Kant's categorical imperative as a procedure, in the process confining Kant's notion of autonomy to the realm of the empirical, the realm of the common, Rawls affirms the main problematic features of liberal ideas of autonomy: a reliance on the notion of fixed choice, a unified and rationally reflective self, and the presuppositions of human equality and social harmony.

Feminist Critiques of Liberal Autonomy

Liberal interpretations of autonomy that portray it as an individual faculty of rational reflection, have led many feminists to reject, outright, the very notion of autonomy. Feminists and other critics of liberalism suggest that the liberal idealization of rationalism and independence leads to the devaluation of those considered "dependent" or not fully rational and, furthermore, denies the human condition of fundamental interdependence. Communitarians such as Michael Sandel (1998) critique the liberal vision of autonomy for its unrealistically atomistic portrayal of human subjectivity, arguing that this assumption leads to an unjust and anti-relational social order. In a related approach, many feminists

reject the idea of autonomy for what they see as its implicit invocation of an abstract, masculine, and non-dependent subject.

The normative liberal model of citizenship as a status of independence means that dependents, often women, children, and the impoverished, are implicitly denied the status of full citizens. Their concerns and needs take a back seat to those of the independent. In reality, such independent figures, mostly men, remain quite *dependent* on the work, concern, and care of others. Marxists feminists see this dynamic in the ideal of the unencumbered worker, who appears “free to choose” employment on the market, but actually depends upon the unwaged and devalued reproductive labor performed by women in the household. (Hartmann 1979; Vogel 1995). Feminists in political theory challenge the idea of autonomy most forcefully as a vestige of liberalism by tracing it to the narrative origins of the liberal subject in social contract theory.

Carole Pateman and Susan Moller Okin clarify how the liberal idealization of independence expresses and sustains an entrenched hierarchy of gender-based social roles. Pateman returns to the myth of the social contract, to the roots of the free individual of liberalism, to illustrate the exclusion of women from the category of “individual” and from the category of citizen and subject. Social contract theory narratives suggest that in exchange for an escape from the natural world of insecurity and burdensome competition between equals, men come together to found a civil social order, to establish laws meant to stave off the insecurity of unmediated rivalry. Once in place, these agreements institute a sphere of protection around the individual and his property and a separate sphere of debate, where the establishment and alteration of laws takes place. Significantly, only men enter into this symbolic social contract that founds the distinction between the public

world of free and equal citizens and the private world of the “naturally” hierarchical family. As Pateman states, “women have no part in the original contract...” (1988, 11), but rather exist in the murky private world, in that little bit of nature, which operates to sustain the lives of free male citizens.²⁹ This dichotomy between the public and the private founds an ideology of the atomistic, implicitly masculine, subject, the liberal individual shorn from natural dependency and his disavowed dependent, natural, and feminine other.³⁰

Liberal political theory generally treats the ideal individual as a given and fails to note the conditions of his existence, his dependence on a realm of dependents, on the care, labor, and support of women. Pateman and Okin challenge Rawls for this omission, his failure to account for the individual’s footing in the realm of dependence. In his recreation of the social contract, Pateman contends, Rawls speaks only of “one individual, duplicated endlessly. How the duplication takes places is a mystery” (Pateman 1988, 223). Okin notes that when Rawls does mention the family in *A Theory of Justice*, he speaks only of individuals in the original position as “heads of the family,” “as if there were no difference between the advantage or welfare of a household and that of an individual” (1989a, 95). Consequently, “interfamilial relationships—no matter how much power or authority they involve—are perceived as being outside the sphere of the political” (Okin 1979, 281). The world of the family, traditionally of women, remains apolitical, unamenable to struggles for

²⁹ Jean Bethke Elshtain’s *Public Man, Private Woman* (1993) traces the historical development of this division between the public and the private and the manner in which the public world of men gains ascendancy over the world of the private, the world of women.

³⁰ Iris Marion Young notes how this division of public and private orders maps onto the opposition between man and woman and reason and feeling (1993, 141).

justice. Pateman asserts that freedom figured in terms of the social contract always only means freedom for some and subordination for all others.

The liberal vision of the autonomous subject deeply affects the distribution of political influence and attendant social resources. As Martha Fineman observes in her comprehensive investigation into the American mythos of autonomy, “invoking autonomy, we create and perpetuate cultural and political practices that stigmatize and punish those among us labeled dependent” (2004, 31). Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon also note this direct link between the idealization of independence and the pathologizing of dependency and demonstrate this dynamic’s political repercussions. They provide a historical analysis of the term “dependency” in debates about the U. S. welfare state (Fraser and Gordon 1994, 311). The term itself, they suggest, shapes social beliefs about the status of welfare recipients and policy decisions concerning governmental economic support. The pathologizing of dependency occurs strategically, for instance, “naming the problems of poor, solo-mother families as *dependency* tends to make them appear to be individual problems, as much moral or psychological as economic. The term carries strong emotive and visual associations and a powerful pejorative charge” (Fraser and Gordon 1994, 311). In contrast, “hardly anyone today calls recipients of Social Security retirement insurance *dependents*. Similarly, persons receiving unemployment insurance, agricultural loans, and home mortgage assistance are excluded from that categorization, as indeed are defense contracts and the beneficiaries of corporate bailouts and regressive taxation” (Fraser and Gordon 1994, 323). As in the fantasy of the economically independent worker of the early industrial era, who in truth depends on his “wives’ and children’s contributions” (Fraser and Gordon 1994, 319), the fact of fundamental human interdependence is advantageously

concealed for the purposes of sustaining a social hierarchy beneficial only to those in the position to feign independence through social, economic, and cultural clout.

Unmistakably, the romanticizing of independence leads to a cultural distaste for acknowledging conditions of dependency and therefore to an aversion to those associated with care work and domestic labor.³¹ I agree unequivocally with feminist Iris Marion Young, who asserts that “dependency should not be a reason to be deprived of choice and respect, and much of the oppression many marginals experience would be lessened if a less individualistic model of rights prevailed” (1990, 55), and with Joan Toronto who reminds us that “it is a fact of great moral significance that, in our society, some must work so that others can achieve their autonomy” (Toronto 1993, 165). In chapter three, I attend to the social conditions and ideologies of individualism that maintain this false sense of autonomy for some at the expense of others. I detail how a normative aversion to dependence, in the name of the ideal of the self-determined individual, ironically impedes the conditions productive of actual autonomous capacity.

I find that the above feminist critiques, while invaluable for their deconstruction of the ideal liberal subject, too hastily tie the notion of autonomy to a liberal understanding of the subject as an independent individual. As a result, these feminist critiques tend to slide into the same dichotomous thinking that frames liberal beliefs about dependency and autonomy—that they must in some sense be opposed or balanced.³²

³¹ While some might suggest that neoliberalism presents an entirely new vision of the subject that diverges from the liberal ideal of the autonomous subject, if anything, the neoliberal marketization of all aspects of life has only increased the liberal emphasis on self-sufficiency. In this sense, neoliberalism continues liberalism’s denial of the liberal subject’s dependency on the household labor of women. As Wendy Brown suggests, neo-liberal rationality deepens the liberal disavowal of dependency by privatizing all forms of social care, in the process further burdening women and those associated with feminine labor and increasing their social stigmatization. (2003; 2015, 104-6)

³² Grace Clement suggests that these two aspects of subjectivity, relationality and individuation, achieve a balance in a properly caring and autonomous person. She states that “reconciling care and autonomy requires moving beyond these

In contrast, the paradigm of psychoanalysis refuses the conceptual split between vulnerability and autonomy. The subject of analysis is neither entirely self-determined nor entirely ordered by social meaning and relational dynamics, but rather is agential and creative in proportion to its ability to face its dependence on and formation in otherness. Due to its focus on the environmental context of psychic character (of belief patterns and ideals), psychoanalysis helps explain the social-historical origins of binary understandings of subjectivity—as either masterful or determined—while also providing a means to think beyond them.

Carol Gilligan and Jane Flax both look to social-psychic development to explain how gender socialization leads to an understanding of autonomy as in conflict with dependency. Gilligan, like the feminists previously discussed, suggests that dependency and autonomy are *actually* opposed. She claims that women are socialized to attend to others and maintain relationships, while men are taught to think abstractly about relationships and to develop a strong sense of self. This process means that women mostly fail to meet the normal standards of moral development, which posit the masculine traits of independence and autonomy as signs of full moral maturity (Gilligan 1982). Gilligan does find this structural opposition harmful for women, stating that “the feminine voice struggles to resolve” “the conflict between compassion and autonomy, between virtue and power” (1982, 71). In an ameliorative gesture, she proposes a more generous understanding of moral development, one that “recognizes the human need for compassion and care,” to replace the idealization of “the separate self and of moral principles uncompromised by the

ideal types [the liberal individual vs. the relationally oriented subject of an ethic of care] and finding balance between the connections and separations between individuals” (Clement 1996, 43).

constraints of reality” (Gilligan 1982, 98). Although this re-balancing of the valuation of gender-traits surely aligns with feminist political goals, I find that it also reaffirms the opposition between autonomy and dependence in a manner similar to that of liberal culture, which espouses this very dichotomy through normative gender-socialization.

Flax also considers this cultural propensity for understanding autonomy and dependence as conflicting states. Yet, in her psychoanalytic approach, she describes how this dichotomous understanding is reproduced socially—by means of familial gender roles where “fathers symbolize autonomy and independence” and “mothers symbolize dependence” (Flax 1978, 179)—and how this understanding severely impedes the development of agential capacities in both feminine and masculine subjects. In her work with women patients, Flax senses a dissatisfaction with the limitations imposed by a gendered and dichotomous understanding of nurturance and autonomy (1978, 171). Women feel as if they must choose between identifying as an ideal nurturing mother or dis-identifying with normative femininity in an attempt to establish a sense of distinct selfhood, a sense of autonomy. Certainly, the prevalent liberal understanding of autonomy, either as freedom *from others*³³ or as an individual faculty of abstract rational judgment, has contributed to this structural opposition between a self-directed life and a life lived in close connection with others. Flax contends that women want both nurturance and autonomy, but that society, as it is structured and lived out psychically, makes this impossible. This insight alludes to the importance of psychoanalysis for my understanding of receptive autonomy. An understanding of the self as imbricated in a particular social

³³ In chapter three, I discuss, in greater detail, the liberal tendency to portray autonomy as negative liberty.

milieu, as both shaped by and in conflict with social norms, troubles any easy antithesis between self and society or autonomy and dependence.

Psychoanalysis provides a framework from which to interrogate questions of autonomy and dependency in a way that declines to see these two states as incompatible. Centered around Freud's concept of the psyche—a somatic, minded, and conflicting site of human agency—psychoanalysis depicts the subject as vulnerable and dependent, yet potentially agential precisely due to these apparent “weaknesses.” Because of this singular understanding of human agency, psychoanalysis offers a means to reimagine the concept of autonomy, while remaining mindful of the perils of considering subjects as fully rational and ideally self-determined. As the historian Eli Zaretsky claims, the striking value of psychoanalysis for political thought “lies in its refusal to counterpoise dependence and independence as if they were antitheses. It demonstrates rather that the ego reaches down into its earliest, most primal, and essentially immortal dependencies precisely when it is strongest and most independent” (2015, 147). For just this reason, I turn to psychoanalysis in this chapter and in those that follow to reimage autonomy as linked to receptiveness—to the ability to remain open to our dependence on others.

Feminists Reimagine Autonomy

While the notion of autonomy has long been a target for feminists who find resistance to dependence implied in the concept, some feminists have sought to revive the idea for its critical potential. In what has become known as the theory of “relational

autonomy,” feminists reject the liberal assumption that the autonomous self has the ability to reflect on possible choices and actions without any important interference from historical, social, or cultural contexts.³⁴ Instead, relational thinkers attend to how reflection takes place within a social world, often under coercive conditions. Relational accounts suggest that the self’s ability to healthily navigate social constructs and resist the detrimental while embracing the enabling depends on strong self-esteem and a sense of efficacy that can only be provided by relations with others.³⁵

Some early relational theorists, although they account for the influence of the social, appear to reinforce the liberal understanding of autonomy as enabled by a limitation of dependence. Looking to the “traditional woman’s life,” Diana Meyers suggests that women can develop the capacity for autonomy *even though* they have been socialized to serve the needs of others and to accept economic dependence. “These features of the traditional woman’s life do not necessarily rule out personal autonomy” (1987, 622), Meyers states, but they most certainly limit its expression. She qualifies her claim by suggesting that “for men as well as women...personal autonomy...must be attained within a context of choice tempered by childhood socialization” (Meyers 1987, 624). In this sense, everyone experiences a limited or situational kind of autonomy, and it is one’s ability to locate “pockets of autonomy” that determines one’s overall level of autonomous capacity—one’s ability to exercise control over one’s life (Meyers 1987, 626). Although Meyers

³⁴ While not associated with relational autonomy, Sharon Krause’s theory of non-sovereign freedom resembles these theories (2015). Krause contends that contrary to liberal theory’s tendency to portray free agency as sovereign, it is actually a non-sovereign experience. Yet, she claims that this does not mean we should abandon liberal concepts of individuality, self awareness, and responsibility, and that these concepts should still be used when discussing non-sovereign forms of freedom.

³⁵ For a comprehensive collection of these theories, see: Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar’s *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self* (2000).

acknowledges the impossibility of action or thought existing outside of socialization, she still draws from a liberal understanding of autonomy as tied to negative freedom, as necessitating distance from these social influences.

Marilyn Friedman unambiguously defines autonomy as self-determination (2003, 4). Actions only qualify as autonomous if, through a process of self-reflection, an actor can affirm the choices and values she expresses as her own. An autonomous actor must have a certain degree of freedom from “coercion, deception, and manipulation by others,” (Friedman 2003, 5) for her self-reflection to effectively determine her actions. While Friedman does not discount the influence of socialization, that “autonomy requires a social context as an enabling, or casual background” (2003, 17), she does insist that those who act autonomously possess a higher “degree of individuated distinctness and coherence” (2003, 17), that through their actions, such agents reaffirm “certain deeper wants and commitments” expressive of their uniqueness as individuals (2003, 17). Individuation, figured as a partial removal from social influences, grounds Friedman’s notion of autonomy as self-determination.

Other relational accounts, closer to my own theory of receptive autonomy, explicitly reject the split between autonomy and dependency (Abrams 1999; Nedelsky 1989). Jennifer Nedelsky directly challenges the liberal idea that autonomy is incompatible with dependency, claiming that such dichotomous conceptions are “grounded in the deeply ingrained sense that individual autonomy is to be achieved by erecting a wall (or rights) between the individual and those around him” (1989, 12). In actuality, autonomy “can develop only in the context of relations with others (both intimate and more broadly social) that nurture this capacity” (Nedelsky 1989, 11). Thus, Nedelsky goes one step further than

many non-liberal feminist critics of autonomy in recognizing that autonomous capacity is actually enabled by the relational, by a beneficial recognition of interdependence.

While departing from liberalism in her insistence on the falsity of the dependence/autonomy dichotomy, Nedelsky returns to a liberal vision of the unified self in her assertion that “to become autonomous is to come to be able to find and live in accordance with one’s own law” (1989, 10). She claims that autonomy refers to the self’s ability to navigate through an ocean of “shared norms, values, and concepts,” (Nedelsky 1989, 11) in order to arrive at a place of self-governance distinct from a state of governance by others. While seeking to distance herself from liberal individualism, Nedelsky nevertheless relies on an understanding of the self as somewhat static and unified, something upon which we can reflect, recognize, and consciously let guide our choices. Autonomy thus entails a process of navigation or negotiation through social constraints by means of a single interior agency.

Although I am sympathetic to relational accounts for their intent to reimagine autonomy for feminist purposes, I believe that even those thinkers who reject the dichotomy between autonomy and dependence largely fail to take into consideration the inaccessibility of the entirety of the self to rational reflection. These theories also tend to subscribe to an understanding of the self as endowed with a stable and abiding personal identity and emphasize autonomy as a capacity of “choosing” or of “finding” one’s law from among social possibilities. They remain within the paradigm of liberalism that designates autonomy as an aptitude of free-choice—as the capacity to choose reasonably (to choose in a manner consistent with “who I am”) from a set of given opportunities or social values.

Psychoanalytic notions of self-direction, in contrast, not only address the self's lack of absolute intentionality, unity, and transparency, but insist that these characteristics of subjectivity create the very conditions that enable autonomy. In Lacanian readings of Kant's ethics, autonomous acts are necessarily spontaneous and creative rather than measured and deliberate. And, rather than a capacity developed through reason—through deliberative abstraction from social conditions—, autonomy from a psychoanalytic perspective, requires an immersion in our sense of self-alienation, our sense that socialization always only imperfectly directs our thoughts and actions.

Autonomy and Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalytic understandings of subjectivity help us move beyond the autonomy/dependence binary because they disrupt any clean distinction between the social and the self and instead conceive of capacities, such as those associated with autonomy, as aptitudes that might be cultivated by a distinctly social-self. Consequently, these theories, attentive to the psychic realm, to the confluence of a singular being and its existence in relationality, ground my understanding of autonomy as linked to receptiveness—to the ability to remain open to the contingencies and dependencies that we experience in relation to others.

The practice of psychoanalysis aims to encourage a more generous relationship with otherness, whether by bringing to light the self's unconscious thoughts and wishes or by dialogically exploring habituated relational patterns to reveal the enigmatic inheritances

they might express. Psychoanalysis guarantees no harmonious therapeutic resolution of inner conflict, but rather insists on the empowering potential of remaining receptive to sensations of discomfort and alienation. Situations of emotional conflict are encouraged and relived in analysis as a means to explore how one already inexactly inhabits and resists social roles and normative prescriptions. Analysis works as a practical exploration of one's attachments and aversions, an aide in the interrogation of relational patterns that helps reveal which affections appear to encourage self-growth and autonomy, and which ones appear to forestall vitality and self-direction. This awareness, as Nancy Luxon explains in her work on psychoanalysis as a means to explore political subjectivity, "would seem to help individuals to intervene more tacitly into the management of relations of attachment—the experience and endurance of the fractious psychoanalytic relationship teaches them when to seek others out, and when to back away from relationships exhausted of potential" (Luxon 2013, 128). The psychoanalytic encounter serves as a model for the ethical practice I describe in chapter four. An ethics of receptive autonomy entails remaining open to moments of social incoherence and dissent for the purposes of questioning and recreating social-frameworks hitherto considered natural, necessary, or inevitable.³⁶

In the following section, I turn to Lacanian psychoanalysis—a practice that aims to alert the subject to its potential autonomy by encouraging an attunement to otherness—to

³⁶ Julia Kristeva also explains how psychoanalysis acts as a means to social critique. In analysis, desire is elaborated and explored from inside a state of relationality rather than from within the individual analyst or analysand. A questioning of desire occurs through transference and counter-transference, moving across subjective boundaries. This pattern of questioning lives on in both subjects as a kind of non-individualized praxis of critical freedom (1998). Thus, Kristeva presents a psychoanalytic account of freedom similar in nature to my articulation of an ethics of receptive autonomy (Kristeva 1998).

challenge the assumption that autonomy is incompatible with an appreciation of emotions and relationality. Both liberal theorists of autonomy and many feminist critics of liberal autonomy appear to subscribe to this assumption. They both tend to view autonomy, for good or ill, as linked to the faculty of abstract reasoning, to disembodied impartial judgment.³⁷

Susan Moller Okin and Robin May Schott find in Kant's theory of autonomy a particularly pernicious privileging of reason and a parallel rejection of embodiment, emotions, and associated femininity. They interpret Kant's exclusion of "pathological" inclinations from the realm of the moral as an attempt to separate reason from sentiments and to degrade the latter (Okin 1989b; Schott 1997). Okin sees autonomy, in its Kantian form, as necessarily averse to the recognition of important human emotions (1989b). She even suggests that Rawls's theory of justice is salvageable only because it departs from Kant by implicitly acknowledging the significance of moral feelings of empathy and compassion (Okin, 1989b). Undoubtedly, Kant's work affirms traits that, in western society, have been historically associated with men (autonomy, rationality, and the capacity for abstract thought concerning universals) over those ascribed to women (dependency, emotions, and a tendency to consider the particular) (Marwah 2013, 213; Young 1993). I would not suggest otherwise. However, while Okin advises a return to Rawls's theory purified of Kantianism to avoid the worst excesses of rationalism, I propose the opposite.

I will critique Rawls for his adherence to liberal presuppositions concerning subjectivity and autonomy and suggest that, in contradistinction to Rawls's reading of Kant,

³⁷ Louise Antony and Charlotte Witt's anthology, *A Mind of One's Own* (1993), discusses in detail the gendered nature of ideals of reason and objectivity in Western philosophy.

one can glean a kind of radicalism from Kant's ethics, a subversiveness that lies behind his devotion to reason. By reading Kant through the work of Lacanians Alenka Zupančič and Joan Copjec, I derive from his ethics a concept of autonomy created rather than forestalled by the disruptiveness of emotions.

Kant avec Lacan

Lacanian readings of Kant demonstrate that neither Kant's ethical theory nor the kind of autonomy it entails necessarily discounts the importance of the affective register. In contradistinction to what liberal thinkers like Rawls find in Kant for their figurations of autonomy, Lacanians draw out elements of Kant's ethics that directly challenge liberal conceptualizations of the self as primarily cognitive, rational, and self-standing. Through a psychoanalytic understanding of the self as opaque, as neither wholly determined by the social nor every fully distinct from it, and as necessarily emotive and embodied, these theorists support my theorization of autonomy as based not on a skill of adaptive reasoning common to all, but on the capacity to attend to singular experiences of disruption as a means to possible social transformation.

In opposition to Rawls's reading of Kantian autonomy, which, I will show, portrays autonomy as the freedom to rationally choose from among socially available goods, Lacan and Lacanians take seriously Kant's assertion that autonomous ethical action must be non-pathological, that is, not motivated by a recognizable interest, and thus not determined by socially recognized "goods." According to Kant, it is precisely our interest in certain goods

and objects, even if such interest is reasonable, that must become irrelevant if we are to attempt to act autonomously—in a way not influenced by our particular inclinations (Kant 2003, 62). Lacanian readings of Kant suggest that if autonomy cannot mean choosing from among obtainable social options, it must mean refusing all such *possible* choices. This refusal of the given implies a parallel *creation of* social choices that might disrupt and transform normative social conditions.

The theorists I discuss here draw from Lacan's readings of Kant, while also significantly amending Lacan's conclusions regarding ethical action as necessarily subversive.³⁸ Žižek reads Kant as evading the radical potential of his own suppositions, while still providing theoretical insight into the necessarily "evil" (socially abhorrent) nature of the ethical act (2005; 2006).³⁹ For Žižek, the ethical act appears evil from a normative social point of view because it necessarily disregards all socially sanctioned human interests. Zupančič similarly finds in Kant's ethics a recognition of the transgressive nature of autonomous deeds (Zupančič 2000). Correspondingly, Copjec's portrayal of Kant counters the historicist and pluralist grounding of ethics in "what is" (Copjec 1994; 2002). What these Lacanian characterizations of Kantian morality seem to say, somewhat varyingly, is that ethical action qualifies as autonomous because it entails a rejection of given structures of meaning and correlative systems of political-social organization. Ethical

³⁸ In chapter two, I discuss in detail how Copjec's notion of a feminist ethics derives from and challenges Lacan's understanding of ethical action in his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1992). I also discuss Žižek and Zupančič's particular readings of Lacan's ethics.

³⁹ Alain Badiou suggests that liberal capitalist societies portray everything that disrupts the global *imbalance* of power as "evil" because they cannot rightfully claim that the status quo is "good." He states, "to justify their conservatism, the partisans of the established order cannot really call it ideal or wonderful. So, instead, they have decided to say the rest is horrible" (2001, 69). The sentiment behind the drive to foreclose a politics of innovation, of emancipation and creation, reads: "Accept what you've got because the rest belongs to evil" (Badiou 2001, 69). In this chapter, I show how this acceptance of "what is," rather than signaling a rejection of evil, actually aligns with Kant's notion of radical evil. It is precisely an acceptance of the given that is truly unethical or, some would say, "evil."

action avoids being determined by pathological self-interest because it rejects all socially recognizable human interests. All of the following points, which describe Rawls's break with Kant's latent transgressive potential, relate to this assertion that autonomy necessitates a contravention of existing social conventions.

The first point of contestation between Rawls's understanding of Kantian autonomy and my own pertains to his "empiricization" of Kant's categorical imperative. Whereas Kant suggests that we cannot know about the noumenal aspects of being, the realm beyond our immediate experience (Kant 1998), and that this is in fact what alerts us to the possibility of autonomy, to the possibility of the existence of the unconditioned and the uncaused (Kant 1993, 50), Rawls gives empirical content to Kant's notion of autonomy in the form of his two principles of justice (Rawls 1971, 225).

Kant contends that the only means by which we can conceive of the possibility of freedom is by positing two different realms, one realm, the phenomenal, where we live as experiential beings subject to causality, and another, the noumenal, where the possibility of freedom exists. We cannot account for freedom in the realm of the phenomenal, as all dimensions of our lives in the existent world can be explained by causality (Kant 1993, 50). In the world of appearances, the phenomenal world, something always has a cause, something always causes and thus determines the existence of something else. Only because we can think about the possibility of something being uncaused (completely undetermined) do we arrive at the idea of freedom. This idea of freedom leads to the supposition that there must exist a real beyond our comprehension where something might act as its own cause. Kant designates this the noumenal realm. Freedom and the noumenal dimension can only be conceived of in conjunction with one another. Kant states,

“By freedom...I understand the faculty of beginning a state from itself, the causality of which does not in turn stand under another cause determining it.... Freedom in this signification is a pure transcendental idea, which, first, contains nothing borrowed from experience, and second, the object of which also cannot be given in any experience...” (1998, 533). The only thing we can say about freedom is that it comes to us as an idea of the uncaused. We cannot explain or point out manifestations of freedom in our given world. Kant cautions that any attempts we might make to give content to the idea of freedom would express an overstepping of the limits of human reason.

Yet, Kant can certainly be read as giving content to his own notion of autonomy by introducing his well-known categorical imperative: “Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (2002, 37). This statement appears to constitute a guide for autonomous moral action precisely in the way Rawls intends for the principles derived from his original position to direct moral action. However, while Kant appears at times to suggest that the categorical imperative might act as a guide for acting rationally and autonomously, he also contends that from our limited point of view in the phenomenal world, we can never know *how* the categorical imperative and therefore how autonomy is possible. He states, “...how this presupposition itself [the idea of freedom from which the categorical imperative derives] is possible, no insight can be gained through any human reason” (Kant 2002, 77). Whatever Kant means to imply about the possibility of the realization of his categorical imperative, he explicitly states that we cannot know how such an imperative might be implemented in reality.

Rawls’s original position is meant to serve precisely as a functional model of Kant’s categorical imperative. While Rawls professes that his model ensures the freedom of

subjects from immediate interests, life stations, and the like, it actually introduces many specific assumptions about the nature of rational persons and the end goods they are expected to desire. Rawls claims that “the argument for the two principles of justice does not assume that the parties have particular ends, but only that they desire certain primary goods” (1971, 223). Rawls recognizes the potential problem with basing his two principles on the assumed worth of certain end goods, as the postulation of particular end goals is precisely what Kantian autonomy cautions against. Rawls thus qualifies that the “primary goods,” sought after by rational persons in the original position, have no particular content, that they are only whatever would be desired by rational persons assumed to be equal and free (Rawls 1971, 223). He suggests that these primary goods would include “rights, liberties, and opportunities, and income and wealth” (Rawls 1971, 54). Rawls is able to describe these goods because he has already given specific content to the rational process that would lead to their attainment. He has produced a method of reasoning based on the original position that he hopes might act as a guide for the creation of actual social institutions. In his effort to apply Kant’s categorical imperative to his image of the ideal society, which he expects could be more or less realized, Rawls must give content to Kant’s formal law of reason. Rawls states:

Kant did not show that acting from moral law expresses our nature in identifiable ways that acting from contrary principles does not.... This deficit is made good, I believe, by the conception of the original position. The essential point is that we need an argument showing which principles, if any, free and equal rational persons would choose and these principles must be applicable in practice.... My suggestion is that we think of the original position as in important ways similar to the point of view from which noumenal selves see the world. (Rawls 1971, 225).

Although Rawls claims to develop his idea of the original position from Kant, he violates Kant’s central stipulation for autonomy. Autonomy cannot mean turning to an

empirical model of rational deliberation to choose from among social goods because such a model of deliberation would derive from pragmatic communal principles rather than from principles of a purely *formal law*. Rawls's original position invests (theoretical) human reason with a moral perfectibility that Kant insists it lacks. Kant finds that both principles derived from sensuous inclinations *and* those derived from rational deliberation remain heteronomous. He states that any principle, "whether it be of sensibility (or inclination and taste) or of understanding and reason," because it would have to be "cognized and proven through experience" (Kant 2002, 62), would always only express "*heteronomy* of the will" (Kant 2002, 62). For Kant, the moral law cannot act as a set of instructions for arriving at a set of empirical conditions that could lead to the expression of autonomy. Rather, the moral law must act as a hollow *imperative*, an order that one act ethically without a provision of what this would look like in reality. The moral law that underlies autonomy must remain empty until fulfilled by an act. The empirical conditions for the act cannot be pre-given in the law, as a law instructing specific actions would come to the actor as an externally imposed law. Such a law would render the actor heteronomous rather than autonomous.

In providing empirical principles for the categorical imperative, Rawls acknowledges his significant departure from Kant. Rawls admits that he has deviated from Kant in that he has recast Kant's moral theory "within the scope of an empirical theory" (1971, 227). He states "the original position may be viewed then, as a procedural interpretation of Kant's conception of autonomy and the categorical imperative within the framework of an empirical theory" (Rawls 1971, 226). Rather than refraining from interrogating the specifics of the realization of moral autonomy in the empirical, as Kant directs us to, Rawls provides a list of appropriate rational motives for moral "autonomous"

action. Rawls's list of primary goods describes what one would presume to be the desires of an ideal liberal subject poised to choose freely from an array of societal options by means of a calculation of personal interest. The calculations of interest that produce the principles of justice, Rawls affirms, "must rely upon current knowledge as recognized by common sense and the existing scientific consensus" (1971, 480). Rawls's figuration of autonomy readily resembles the ideal as portrayed by Christman (1989) and Hill (1984), both of whom suggest that autonomy is the capacity to choose freely and rationally from among given social possibilities.

In contrast, Kant, although he occasionally backed away from the implications of his disdain for empirical figurations of morality,⁴⁰ sought to extricate moral autonomy from the conditions of immediate existence. He states, "empirical principles are everywhere unsuited to having moral laws grounded in them" (Kant 2002, 59). While Rawls seeks to ground his notion of autonomy in a provision of principles derived from specific assumptions about reasonable human interest in certain empirical goods, Kant urges us to avoid this tendency to allow principles "taken from the particular adaptation of human nature or from the contingent circumstances in which it is placed" (2002, 59) to determine our actions as moral beings. Kant asserts, "Only a formal law, i.e., one which prescribes to reason nothing more than the form of its giving universal law as the supreme condition of maxims, can be a priori a determining ground of practical reason" (1993, 67). Even in his positing of the categorical imperative, Kant ultimately seeks to provide only the form of the law, not the content.

⁴⁰ Lacan suggests that Kant retreats from his conclusion that morality remains detached from objects of affection in claiming that feelings of respect and admiration might attach to moral law (1992, 316). In this manner, Kant attempts to join moral law to something experiential rather than acknowledge the gap between the sensible and the moral that he initially posits. Lacan claims that, in this way, Kant fails to keep open the gap between what is and what may be.

Many feminists see Kant's formalism as a problematic flight from embodiment. Some, like Schott have interpreted Kant's call to disallow the particularities of existence to determine moral action as an attempt to deny the situated nature of all moral perspectives in the interest of privileging a falsely universal and impartial vantage point—the outlook of a masculine, “disembodied, disembedded self” (Schott 1997, 479). Certainly, Kant can be read as figuring “moral subjects as, above all, rational, autonomous, and freed from contingency” (Okin 1989b, 240). As Okin suggests, this is what Rawls draws from Kant in his attempt to ground autonomy in a “refusal to allow feelings any place in the formulation of moral principles” (1989b, 231). And, while Okin seeks to rectify this anti-feminist denial of the particular and the sensuous in Rawls by drawing out his implicit invocation of un-Kantian notions of empathy, compassion, and responsibility (1989b, 230)—the fact that “each person in the original position” must “take the good of others into account” (1989b, 243)—I contend that it is precisely this return to considerations of “the good” that leads Rawls astray from the socially valuable aspects of Kant's ethical theory.

In contrast to feminists who see Kant's formalism as the source of Rawls's incongruity with feminist aims (Benhabib 1987; Okin 1989b; Young 1993), I find that it is actually Rawls's lack of formalism that undermines his depiction of Kantian autonomy as an ethical theory productive of a feminist politics. Lacanian feminists Copjec and Zupančič reserve Kant's formalism and insist that to do otherwise, to provide empirical content to moral law as Rawls does, is to tarnish the ethical potential of Kant's theory of autonomy.

For Lacanians, the form of desire, which alerts us to the possibility of something beyond our immediate reality, ensures that autonomy and ethical action remain possible for us (Copjec 2002, 2). It is only by following our desire that we might give our own

singular content to moral law through an act that instantiates something hitherto thought to be impossible in society. Rawls appears to pre-fill the empty form of moral law by identifying autonomy with the capacity to choose a path or follow an interest from a socially acceptable array of options. As Copjec suggests, this submission to “what is” repudiates “the possibility of an autonomous will—one that is not dependent on others—and of ethics itself...” (2002, 141). Such empirical renderings of Kant “make what is historically present and true the sole standard of what should be and thus dissolve ‘ought’ in the medium of a historical ‘is’” (Copjec 2002, 141). Or, as Paul Eisenstein and Todd McGowan explain in terms of Kant’s moral law: “Any positive content obscures the law’s rupture with the given” (2012, 147). Kantian autonomy cannot mean rational free choice, which would mean adapting to one of many already established social options. This type of adaptive reasoning indicates dependence on pathological self-interest pursuant with given social “goods.”

Autonomy requires a break with established order, as only such a break enables freedom from determination by socially fixed conditions. In contrast to liberal Kantian interpretations of autonomy, which seek to ground Kantian ethics in the realm of the status quo, Zupančič suggests that Kantian ethics pertains to the order of the Real, to the disruptive and “‘impossible’ thing that turns our symbolic universe upside down and leads to the reconfiguration of this universe” (2000, 235).⁴¹ Kantian ethics, read through Lacan, entails that given social ideals, goods, or objects, “the good—my own good, the good of my

⁴¹ Lacan calls that which resists symbolization and capture by cognition the “Real.” Since the Real indicates something outside of language and thought must take place within language, only when thought and meaning overtly fail do we encounter the Real. When we come across the unthinkable and the impossible, when we are unable to digest, explain, or make sense of an occurrence, we confront the Real (Lacan and Fink 1998). See chapter two for a more detailed account of Lacan’s notion of the Real and how it relates to the ethical.

fellow man or the good of the community cannot be the cause (motive or ground) of an ethical action” (Zupančič 1998, 108). Such a dependence on “what is” renders the actor determined by sensuous interests rather than autonomous. On the contrary, ethical, potentially autonomous, action involves a refusal of given social coordinates and a turn to the impossible—the unfathomable that we sense in encounters with otherness that disrupt our adherence to social narratives and identities. Zupančič explains that “This is when ethics comes into play, in the question forced upon us by an encounter with the Real: will I act in conformity to what threw me out of joint, will I be ready to reformulate what has hitherto been the foundation of my existence?... For Lacan, the accent is to be placed, first, on desire (‘Have you acted in conformity with the desire that inhabits you?’), for it is desire that aims at the impossible, the Real” (Zupančič 2000, 235). Kant’s moral imperative, in this reading, is not an imperative telling us what to do but is, rather, a pure provocation toward the impossible.

In contrast, empiricism, in its refusal to move beyond the apparent, aligns with Kant’s understanding of radical evil (Zupančič 2001, 6). Zupančič notes that “when Kant speaks of ‘empiricism in morals,’ he describes this empiricism with exactly the same words that he later uses to describe ‘radical evil’” (Zupančič 2001, 6). The empiricist imperative directs us to give up on the possibility of ever acting in accordance with something beyond given social laws of conduct that direct us to pursue our own interests. Kant, Zupančič suggests, sees this acceptance of our predispositions as the sole guiding force of our actions as the human proclivity toward radical evil. Rawls’s account of Kantian autonomy (and related liberal accounts), which portrays autonomy as the capacity to choose rationally and

freely from among worldly options, appears tarnished by just such a pathological adherence to given social orders.

Copjec contends that countless modern evils result from attempts to represent the supersensible ideal of freedom as something to be obtained in the given phenomenal world. While Kant argues that we cannot comprehend how freedom might function in actuality, that it must remain a transcendental idea possible only through a postulation of the immortality of the soul (1993, 139), many—I cite Rawls— have attempted to provide a formula for freedom to be realized in the empirical world. Copjec suggests that such attempts to represent freedom work through a “subreption” whereby freedom, “a supersensible idea, that is, one that can never be experienced, is falsely represented as if it were a possible object of experience” (2002, 149).⁴² Rather than accept that freedom cannot be known in mortal experience, freedom is presented as an obtainable goal. This presentation of freedom, as something given, as something already available in experience, removes the “ought” from Kant’s moral imperative. As Copjec explains, “the only way we know that we *can* act freely—that is, that we *are* free—is through the voice of consciousness, which tells us that we *ought* to free ourselves from our slavery to external motives” (2002, 144).⁴³ In assuming that freedom exists as an empirical condition, the subject remains unethically confined within what is, unable to summon the motivation to act otherwise than according to accepted social patterns and beliefs. In believing freedom lies within the bounds of the

⁴² Kant describes subreption as the misrepresentation of sensibly derived concepts as objectively true suppositions in his *Inaugural Dissertation of 1770* (1894).

⁴³ It is our knowledge that we might act “otherwise,” that alerts us to the possibility of autonomy. Eisenstein and McGowan explain that in *The Critique of Practical Reason*, “Kant conceives of the existence of and our interest in the law as proof of our freedom. We see that we can act differently (that we are free) at the moment when we experience a compulsion to act differently (thanks to moral law)” (2012, 144).

empirically possible, “the subject is assimilated to its concrete, historically defined particularities” (Copjec 2002, 150). This, however, is not the most tragic aspect of the subreption of Kant’s notion of transcendental freedom.

While the subject adhering to an empirical vision of freedom does indeed remain confined within given social rules and commands, it does not so easily give up the desire for an “otherwise.” Copjec suggests that although the subject remains grounded in what is, “its freedom and immortality return in the fantasy of progress to infinity (to which National Socialists were not the only ones to wholly commit themselves). Within this fantasy, subjective finitude and failure are effaced by promises of progress” (2002, 150). Not only does the effort to empiricize Kant’s notion of autonomy result in a submission to the given, it compels a compensatory reaction to this submission. In an unacknowledged attempt to resist this confinement within concrete experience, we transform our longing for immortality into a fantasy of perpetual progress, a drive to defer death that in reality “binds us to death by reducing life to the struggle against it” (Copjec 2002, 151). The empiricization of Kant’s moral imperative that results in a longing for *empirical immortality*, which heralds an unending struggle against death, ironically results in “the most unimaginable horrors and an undeniable ‘contempt for life’” (Copjec 2002, 152). Copjec claims that “the eugenic schemes of National Socialism are only the most obvious display of the paradoxical effects of the subreption...” (2002, 152). Accordingly, Kant’s stipulation that autonomy cannot be realized in “what is,” that we always fail to act morally when we act in accordance with the given, while it may appear to be a rather cruel and unforgiving precept, actually safeguards our ability to reject existing modes of being and resist the urge to realize a tragic form of immortality in the here and now.

While Kantian ethics read through Lacan implies negation—in the necessary rejection of given depictions of the good life, of all socially available options—his ethics also implies the possibility of creation, the birth of entirely new visions of the good life. Rather than freedom to choose from “what is” in the phenomenal world, autonomy requires the creation of a choice, a move into what has hitherto seemed impossible. Lacan contends that in opposition to traditional ethics, which “concerned itself with what one was supposed to do ‘insofar as it is possible,’” Kant “posits that the moral imperative is not concerned with what may or may not be done” but rather with an “unconditional ‘Thou shalt’” (1992, 315). Lacan characterizes this moral imperative as the path of desire. Desire, like Kant’s postulate of immortality—the idea that we cannot perfectly conform to moral law in this lifetime—places us on a trajectory toward the impossible rather than toward the possible as in traditional ethics. Lacan states:

The reason why there is human desire, that the field can exist, depends on the assumption that everything real that happens may be accounted for somewhere. Kant managed to reduce the essence of the moral field to something pure; nevertheless, there remains at its center the need for a space where accounts are kept. It is this that is signified by the horizon represented by his immortality of the soul (1992, 317).

Desire, as that which compels us to move beyond the given constraints of our social existence, mirrors Kant’s formal “thou shalt.” This imperative, rather than telling us what to do, commands us to face the void of moral law and act in accordance with our desire—the force that compels us away from the given in its incessant search for something more. This compulsion toward the impossible implied in autonomous comportment means that such a comportment must act to redraw the boundaries around what has hitherto seemed socially possible. In this way, the path of autonomy, the path of desire, might lead to the comprehensive redefinition of the social imaginary.

An ethical comportment of receptive autonomy involves the possibility of transformative creation, in that it inheres as an ability to create choices rather than to acquiesce to socially viable ones. Such an ethics is readily defined as “the ability *to choose where there is no choice...*” (Zupančič 1998, 110).⁴⁴ As I show in chapter four, through a depiction of the Baltimore Uprising, the creation of choice has the potential to disrupt and transform the limits of the socially possible. Žižek explains, the ethical “...act is not only a gesture that does the impossible but an intervention into social reality that changes the very coordinates of what is perceived to be possible; it is not simply beyond the good, it redefines what counts as good” (2000b, 671-2). Ethical actions, which stem from the inhabitation of an autonomous comportment, move beyond the boundaries of the individual self (where autonomy remains confined in liberal theory), as such actions tend to disrupt and recreate social orders of existence. Describing the parallel nature of psychoanalytic ethics and Kantian ethics, Paul Allen Miller summarizes how one might interpret Kantian autonomy through Lacanian analysis as in opposition to liberal autonomy. Miller states, “real substantial, freedom—as opposed to its pale abstract imitation in a bourgeois philosophy of rational choice, the consumerist calculus of economic man—can only be achieved through the act, through an intervention in the world that does not simply repeat the existing order, and hence has no prior justification in that

⁴⁴ Bonnie Honig supports Zupančič’s reading of *Antigone* as illustrative of ethics as creating choice rather than submission to given choices (Honig 2013, 171-181). Yet, she amends Zupančič’s reading to suggest, contra Zupančič, that Ismene, Antigone’s sister, also rises to the challenge and breaks with forced choice “choosing neither flagrant disobedience nor meek inaction” (Honig 2013, 177). This conclusion is based on Honig’s reading of the play, which suggests that Ismene and Antigone bury their brother Polyneices together. In this sense, both sisters are *ethical and political* (Honig 2013, 177). While I will not focus on the issue of Ismene’s ethical or non-ethical action, I do suggest some similarities between Honig’s reading of the play and my own in chapter two. Like Honig, I also turn to *Antigone* to consider a mode of ethical action which crosses over into the realm of the political, affecting a change in the conditions of the socially possible (Honig 2013, 174, 177, 180).

order” (Miller 2007b, 57). Far from how Rawls understands autonomy—as an exercise of rational free choice ideally productive of social harmony—, true autonomy is disruptive, creative, and potentially transformative in nature.

Not only does Rawls reduce Kantian autonomy to the ability to adapt to existing conditions, but he also reinforces Kant’s understanding of autonomy as a capacity of universalizable and reproducible subjects. He does so without attending to Kant’s stipulation that moral law gives only form and never content. In presenting the original position as a procedural empirical replica of Kant’s categorical imperative, Rawls depicts autonomy as a method to be taken up by agents equally able to reason abstractly from a universal position of judgment. Although Rawls insists on the universal and objective character of this form of rational procedure, his model of the original position, because it is meant to serve as a basis for the societal selection of appropriate social goods, does not qualify as a model of Kantian autonomy. Rawls’s empiricization of the categorical imperative does not align with Kant’s notion of autonomy if one takes seriously Kant’s assertion that moral autonomy requires a disregard for all ends that might be sought after in the empirical world.

In depicting moral law as a universalizable procedure, while also expressing that such a procedure acts as a means to arrive at particular content, Rawls effaces the important singularity of subjects, their desire, their particular form of alienation from common meaning—the only simultaneously universal and particular aspect of being. Rawls states that in the original position, “we do not look at the social order from our situation but take up a point of view that everyone can adopt on equal footing. In this sense we look at our society and our place in it objectively: we share a common standpoint along with

others and do not make our judgments from a personal slant” (1971, 453). Rawls suggests that “one consequence of trying to be objective, of attempting to frame our moral conceptions and judgment’s from a shared point of view, is that we are more likely to reach agreement” (1971, 453). Rawls contends that his principles of justice derive from a “common point of view” (1971, 4), a point of view of reproducible subjects.

This representation of autonomy, as obedience to a law of common reason, fails to account for both the dissident nature of autonomy and the necessary singularity of subjects, the distinct “auto,” the self, that must exist to even consider the possibility of “self-law.” In rendering Kantian moral law as a *law common to all*, rather than as a *formal universal law*, Rawls gives moral law a common content. He violates Kant’s stipulation that moral law serves only as a form of law never as a guide for what *we must all do*. The problem with understanding moral law as a set of instructions for acting in a rational analytic way, that is, in a way aligned with a certain reading of Kant’s categorical imperative,⁴⁵ is that action based on such procedural reasoning remains determined by common sense, by what is held in common. As Copjec explains, this is the trouble with reading Kantian autonomy as figured solely by the categorical imperative. She states, that such a reading of moral law, “...imagines a choice prescribed by law, however formal it may be, and reduces the notion of the universal to that of the common” (Copjec 2002, 18). In opposition to interpreting Kantian moral law as a law of the common, Lacanian renderings of Kant’s ethics demonstrate that the self’s *singularity* (a universal formal condition)

⁴⁵ Kant himself appears to reduce the universal to the common in reading the categorical imperative as a means to act in accordance with the reason that all human beings possess in common (Kant 2002, 21).

supports the possibility of autonomy. This enabling singularity results from the self's particular symptomatic alienation from a world of collective meaning.

Žižek suggests that Lacan's depiction of the subject, as instantiated by alienation from the world of collective signification, mirrors Kant's understanding of the divided nature of being between noumenal and phenomenal dimensions. Kant's assertion that we cannot know the noumenal aspect of being echoes Lacan's understanding of the subject as never fully acquainted with itself. Žižek states, "the subject is not directly accessible to himself, because (as Kant put it) I can never know what I am in my noumenal dimension as the 'Thing which thinks.'" (2006, 244). The unknowable or noumenal dimension of being parallels the point at which Lacan suggests that the subject fails to account for herself in the Symbolic, in the language of the Other.⁴⁶ The subject's inability to perfectly inhabit the social identity that it comes to recognize as "its own," an identity spoken in the language of the Other, means that every attempt at self-reflection, every move to reassert self-identification, ultimately reproduces a gap between being and the meaning one ascribes to being. Žižek suggests that this gap, this "non-substantial point of reference" (Žižek 2006, 244), exists as the core of the subject's freedom—its only mark of pure singularity. He contends that "all the figures of positive self-acquaintance are just so many secondary 'fillers' of this primordial gap..." (Žižek 2006, 244). These secondary identificatory "fillers" exist as phenomenal designations, as attempts to fill the unfillable gap between existence and reflection on existence, a reflection that must take place in the language of the Other. This gap between being and self-reflection, "this very moment of the failure of

⁴⁶ I use the Lacanian term "Other" to designate the world of language and culture, as well as that which the subject comes to see as other to itself. This can be other people, as well as feelings, actions, desires, and thoughts that may emit from the self, but feel alien to it. This use of the term "Other," slightly deviates from the typical Lacanian use of the term to designate the world of language. For a more detailed discussion of Lacan's term "Other," see chapter two.

identification” (Žižek 2006, 244) provides the basis for the subject’s potential freedom from the Other.

The gap in the Lacanian subject resembles the Kantian subject’s apperception of transcendental freedom. Kant contends that we only know of freedom as something other than what is. While we can consider the *possibility* of freedom, the experience of freedom fails to appear to us in the phenomenal world. The idea of freedom “is not simply a transcendental entity beyond our grasp, but something that is discernable only via the irreducibly antinomic character of our experience in reality” (Žižek 2006, 20). The transcendental idea of freedom emerges from a gap produced by our existence in the phenomenal world of determination and our awareness of the idea of freedom—an idea for which we cannot provide empirical content. This is the same gap that appears in the Lacanian subject, the point at which the subject perceives that collective language will always leave something about its being unsaid. But, like the idea of freedom, nothing more can be said about the unsayable. Žižek contends that “...the Kantian ‘transcendental’ ... points to something in this gap, a new dimension which cannot be reduced to either of the two positive terms [the phenomenal or the noumenal] between which the gap is gaping” (Žižek 2006, 21). To endeavor to fill in this gap—the very point at which the subject grasps freedom—through self-reflective reasoning based on the assumption of an objectively “true” personal identity, is to eschew the possibility of freedom, the possibility that we *might* act otherwise than in accordance with our social identities.

Rawls and other liberal theorists who attempt to ground autonomy in the abstract universal judgment of self-identified agents aspire to close this transcendental gap and, in the process, they efface the most significant factor for the subject’s potential autonomy—

her unique difference, her specific manner of failing to adequately inhabit a social identity. Dworkin and Feinberg's suggestion that autonomy requires an affirmation of chosen actions, thoughts, and beliefs as one's own echoes Rawls's claim that autonomy demands the capacity for abstract judgment—the capacity to inhabit a third person view of one's self and identify with this ideal self's movements. Dworkin states, "if a person's reflections have not been manipulated, coerced, and so forth and if the person does have the requisite identification, then they are, on my view autonomous" (1989, 20). This identification and verification of authenticity, Feinberg claims, takes place by means of rational self-reflection. This self-reflection requires the ability to think abstractly (from a third person perspective) about one's motives and interests and to subsequently identify with those deemed compatible with one's core identity. Feinberg explains: "A person is authentic to the extent that, unlike both the inner-directed and the other-directed person, he can and does subject his opinions and tastes to rational scrutiny. He is authentic to the extent that he can and does alter his convictions for reasons of his own, and does so without guilt or anxiety" (1989, 32). Rawls suggests that the original position serves as a procedural model of this type of rational reflection and identification. "The parties' aim in the original position," Rawls states, "is to establish just and favorable conditions for each to fashion his own unity. Their fundamental interest in liberty and in the means to make fair use of it is the expression of their seeing themselves as primarily moral persons with an equal right to choose their mode of life" (1971, 493). Rational self-reflection demands the ability to think "as if" one was not singular, as if one was devoid of individual interests, inhabiting a view above such particularities. Paradoxically, for such rational decision-making to qualify as

autonomous, one must be able to identify with the particular choices made from such a position, to take them up as one's own.

Liberal autonomy, conceived of as founded on this type of rational self-reflection, thus entails first an effacement of one's particularities and second an identification with the particularities one can claim as one's own.⁴⁷ Lacanian readings of Kant counter both of these moves of procedural autonomy. Kant, Zupančič notes, realizes that "the subject can never occupy the position of such an ideal observer (of oneself)" (2000, 72). The subject cannot rise above her circumstances for the purposes of abstract self-reflection. Rather, while she must posit that this transcendental point of observation exists, she must also concede that she knows nothing about it. It is the point of view of some Other. "According to Kant," Zupančič asserts, "the subject of knowledge has no direct access to this point of view...he cannot...see himself seeing" (2000, 74). However, in acknowledging the existence of such a view, the subject both manages to see herself as a unity (someone must see all of me), while simultaneously affirming her split nature—her contemplation of herself in contemplation. Zupančič clarifies:

The paradox lies, of course, in the fact that in order to reach this unity, the subject has to lose his organic unity. Identification with this virtual point of view already requires and presupposes the division (or alienation) of the subject. The fact that I am perceiving myself as a person (identical in time) implies that my personhood, in its very core, is already marked by the point of view of the Other (2000, 74).

Thus, while Rawls and other liberal accounts of autonomy council identification with this virtual "objective" point of view, as a means to autonomous action, what they really propose is a means to identify with an imagined *common* point of view and thus to

⁴⁷ Christine M. Korsgaard suggests that at the heart of Kantian morality is the duty to act in such a way that one's actions constitute one's identity as an agential self-governing subject. She thus reads Kantian morality as explicitly demanding self-determination through the self-construction of identity (Korsgaard 2009). As I explain, however, identity can never be "self" constructed in this way, as identity exists only through representation in language.

submit to determination by the Other. This would be the antithesis of Kantian ethics, which prohibits us to allow another's will to determine our ethical path. As Žižek notes, Kantian ethics forbids "the subject to assume the position of the object-instrument of Other's jouissance" (6, 1998). One must instead take action from one's singular position, from one's particular point of alienation from collective meaning, rather than act according to the social expectations tied to one's identity and, whatever may transpire, take responsibility for the results of such action.⁴⁸

The liberal formulation of autonomy, as a procedure of self-reflection and self-identification, denies the split nature of the subject in presupposing a core identifiable self, while also demanding a reenactment of this split in abstract rational deliberation.⁴⁹

Liberals like Rawls (1971), Hill (1989), and Dworkin (1989) contend that autonomy

⁴⁸ Žižek suggests that Kant's insistence on the formalism of autonomy (derived from moral law) prevents the subject from morally justifying his actions as forced by the hand of the Other. Kantian morality, far from advancing the idea that anything one chooses to do can be justified from the standpoint of moral law, actually precludes any shift in responsibility from the subject to the Other. Žižek contends: "According to the standard critique, the limitation of the Kantian universalist ethic of the 'categorical imperative' (the unconditional injunction to do our duty) resides in its formal indeterminacy: moral Law does not tell me what my duty is, it merely tells me that I should accomplish my duty, and so leaves the space open for empty voluntarism (whatever I decide to be my duty is my duty). However, far from being a limitation, this very feature brings us to the core of Kantian ethical autonomy: it is not possible to derive the concrete norms that I must follow in my specific situation from the moral Law itself – which means that the subject himself must assume responsibility for the translation of the abstract injunction of the moral Law into a series of concrete obligations. The full acceptance of this paradox compels us to reject any reference to duty as an excuse, along the lines of, I know this is heavy and can be painful, but what else can I do, this is my duty ...' Kant's ethics of unconditional duty is often taken as justifying such an attitude – no wonder Adolf Eichmann himself referred to Kantian ethics when attempting to justify his role in the planning and execution of the 'final solution': he was simply doing his duty by obeying the Führer's orders. However, the aim of Kant's emphasis on the subject's full moral autonomy and responsibility is precisely to prevent any such maneuver of shifting the blame on to some figure of the big Other" (2005, 399).

Hannah Arendt first brought this insight about Eichmann's misrepresentation of Kantian morality to light in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Arendt states: "The first indication of Eichmann's vague notion that there was more involved in this whole business than the question of the soldier's carrying out orders that are clearly criminal in nature and intent appeared during the police examination, when he suddenly declared with great emphasis that he had lived his whole life according to Kant's moral precepts, and especially according to a Kantian definition of duty. This was outrageous, on the face of it, and also incomprehensible, since Kant's moral philosophy is so closely bound up with man's faculty of judgment, which rules out blind obedience" (1963, 135-136).

⁴⁹ Korsgaard reads Kant as suggesting that this capacity to inhabit two standpoints is crucial for moral agency. Yet, she also presupposes moral action requires an integrated unified personal identity (Korsgaard 1996). In this manner, she embodies this tendency to read Kant in a way that ultimately effaces his theory's potential to challenge the predominant understanding of the subject as self-standing and unified.

requires both that one objectively (from the point of view of common reason) evaluate given options and, subsequently, that one select only those options that would affirm one's personhood as either a particular individual, as in Hill and Dworkin's case, or as a rational and equal human being, as in Rawls's case. This mode of selection as a basis for autonomy denies the fact that all such selections, whether they are meant to match our personal identities or to conform to common reason, remain determined by the language of the Other. In actuality, only an affirmation of the incongruity between our personal point of view and our ability to imagine the *possibility* of another point of view (and to not attempt to empiricize this point of view as common reason) allows for autonomy.

A recognition of the "otherness" that exists in excess of our accustomed ways of thinking and believing provides a more certain path to an autonomous comportment. As Zupančič states, "the foundation of the subject's freedom can reside only in some 'foreign body': the subject gains access to freedom only in so far as she finds herself a stranger in her own house" (2000, 23). This awareness that there remains for the subject an alternative (an other) to her most earnest beliefs and inclinations manifests in the subject as a sense of guilt. The subject becomes aware of her freedom only in the moment that she knows she might act differently than the manner in which she is inclined to act. This possibility of an otherwise—arrived at through an awareness of the existence of something foreign to the subject's inclinations—forms the basis for the subject's freedom. Zupančič contends that "Kant takes this 'foreign body' as that which is 'most truly ours,' and founds on it the autonomy and freedom of the subject" (2000, 23). Consequently, even when we profess to derive our views and convictions autonomously, through an internal capacity for

abstract reasoning, such principles nevertheless remain heteronomous, as they remain confined within the held-in-common, within empirical time and space.

Acting according to our *reasonable* beliefs, which are determined by empirical circumstance—the stipulations of a wider community—as liberal autonomy recommends, forestalls actual autonomy. Self-determination, conceived of as the capacity for the rational consideration of available social options, cannot truly qualify as autonomy. Rather, autonomy demands an attunement to desire, an inhabitation of our specific form of alienation from the point of view of the Other, not a false identification with our socialized identities. Because the singular aspect of the subject is this space of ill-fit with collective signification, only tuning in to the disruptive and the dissonant aspects of normative life provides the basis from which we *might* carry ourselves autonomously and reject entrenched ways of being and begin to forge new ones.

In defining autonomy as an individual's universal capacity for rational deliberation (1971, 16), Rawls propagates the liberal understanding of the subject as self-determined, as free from the otherness that pervades all aspects of self-reflection. Liberal accounts portray Kantian autonomy as a mode of rational free choice from among socially available possibilities. Consequently, these liberal theories drain the latent subversiveness from Kant's political philosophy, his gesture to the limits of empirical reason, conformity, and social harmony.

In contrast, an ethics of receptive autonomy necessitates an openness to the disorientations one experiences in a life lived among others. It is the stimulating yet disturbing presence of otherness that awakens the self to possibilities not yet articulable in a given social order. Following from no social givens, no pictures of the normative “good

life,” these latent possibilities remain autonomously derived from the self in its interaction with otherness. In this sense, an ethics of receptive autonomy might most aptly be described as a receptive, yet dissident, approach to the social-self nexus rather than as a property or faculty of a rational, individual, and unified self.

The Role of Love

Both Lacanian and non-Lacanian psychoanalytic theorists consider the necessary presence of others for an ethical life aligned with a capacity for autonomy. While Lacanian readings of Kantian ethics suggest that otherness, in the form of enigmas produced by collective meaning, acts as a self-disruptive presence that enables critical social resistance and creative political engagement, feminist psychoanalysts like Young-Bruehl and Jessica Benjamin see the self’s encounter with otherness in empowering yet fraught intersubjective relationships.⁵⁰ Despite these differences in approach, both strains of psychoanalytic thought suggest that ethics demands a readiness to engage with otherness; They both discuss this engagement in terms of a disposition to love.

Love figures in these accounts neither as a loss of the self, as in an idealization of and assimilation to the beloved, nor as a narcissistic re-finding of the self, but rather as a kind of responsiveness without compliance. Miller and Copjec suggest that an ethical form of relationality affirms self-difference and other-difference (Miller 2007b, 97), thus allowing for shifts in social-self relations. Copjec suggests that the act of loving, rather than

⁵⁰ I discuss these feminist psychoanalytic accounts of enablement in chapter three.

a pathological submission to the sensuous and the emotional, as some interpretations of Kant might suggest, fosters an ethical sense of self-direction.⁵¹ She explains that love is not pathological because, in loving, “we are not passively affected by the object of love, we actively affect ourselves by loving it.....The pathological object—unlike the object of love—does not affect us from the point of difference from itself” (Copjec 2002, 80). As I clarify in chapter two, love in Copjec’s terms refers to a sustained fascination with the inexplicable in the other as it relates to the inexplicable within ourselves. The unsettling nature of the strangeness endemic to loving encounters—the very disruptive nature of love—tends to attenuate normative boundaries of social identity and therefore encourages a reconsideration of customary social arrangements. Love primes the self to reject the given and engage in creative modes of meaning-making, political action, and connecting/disconnecting with others.

Similarly, love, as described by the Freudian thinkers I discuss in chapter three, names our linked experiences of deprivation and generosity at the hands of others, experiences that fabricate our attachments as well as the porous borders of our very being—the boundaries across which we experience these flows of loss and abundance. The dynamic proximity of nourishment and nourishment’s lack, arranged in accordance with a specific historical social energetic environment, determines the qualities and capacities of selfhood, whether the self will affirm the risky ways of love or deny relationality in an attempt to resist and refuse the uncertainties of interconnection. I find that the latter path

⁵¹ Copjec’s belief that love is not always pathological in a Kantian sense would challenge many claims that suggest the opposite. Her account contrasts with Bernard Williams’s contention that one must read Kant as problematically dismissive of emotion’s role in determining moral action (Williams 1973).

of fortification and defense, the path idealized by liberal autonomy, deprives the self of the energetic qualities required for autonomous capacity.

The ability to challenge accustomed ways of being and conceive of creative new modes of relationality demands a certain responsiveness to otherness, a responsiveness that characterizes what Katrin Pahl calls “emotionality” (2009). Emotionality describes a kind of self-disruptiveness that remains neither confined within individual beings, nor trapped within the gap between beings (Pahl 2009, 552). Rather, “something is emotional when it registers and dynamically responds to its incongruence with itself” (Pahl 2009, 547-8). Self-disruptiveness occurs, as Lacanians would suggest, in singular beings’ incongruence with a world of shared meaning and, as psychoanalysis in general recognizes, in the very processes that disrupt infantile wholeness (the “feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the eternal world as a whole”) (Freud 2010, 25) and instantiate self-reflection and selfhood simultaneously. As I detail in the following chapters, autonomy requires a readiness to experience disruption, as disruption encourages response and resistance, the very bearings that create the permeable boundaries of the self. Liberal theories of autonomy preclude receptive autonomy, as they circulate an image of the self as a citadel (Christman 1989), as a place for resisting the surprising, the unpredictable, and the unsettling occurrences that existence in relationality guarantees.

In light of the paradoxical nature of liberal theories of autonomy—that they propagate ideals that discourage the receptiveness required for actual autonomy—the interrogation of the idea of autonomy should not remain solely within the purview of liberal political thought. I intend for my re-theorization of autonomy to hearten non-liberal reflection on what it might mean to inhabit a posture of self-direction critical of potentially

detrimental social mores. Because critical theory currently tends to wholly resist considering the worth of autonomy, due to the concept's historical ties to liberalism, many of the socially valuable decisively non-liberal aspects of the ideal remain under-theorized in non-liberal political theory. As a rejoinder to this trend, I aim to contribute to critical political thought, a way of conceiving of autonomy as an ethical comportment conducive to capacities of critique, creativity, and self-direction. Significantly, this includes the development of political practices and beliefs antithetical to many liberal suppositions.

Psychoanalysis forms the theoretical basis for my understanding of autonomy as it disrupts liberal assumptions concerning subjectivity and agency, such as the tenets of rationalism, universalism, and non-dependence, while also emphasizing the importance of capacities of critique, creativity, and self-direction. The psychoanalytic theories I draw from in the following chapters consider the historical and social nature of selfhood and the implications such context has on the self's capacity for autonomy. Psychoanalysis neither assumes selfhood, in that it does not take human reason or even human psychic-somatic boundaries as given, nor denies the possibility of a coherent self with the ability to shift the social conditions of which it is a part. With these insights in mind, I speak to the broader importance of psychoanalysis as a crucial resource for considerations concerning the particular manner in which collective meaning fails to fully determine the psychic life of political agents.

Chapter Two: Ethics and the Ruptured Subject

In this chapter, I look to the work of Lacan and Lacanians Joan Copjec and Alenka Zupančič to further develop my theory of receptive autonomy as a counter to those theories that suggest autonomy requires an overcoming (as in liberal theory) or repudiation (as in critiques of liberal autonomy) of relationality. Copjec's notion of the subject's capacity for social resistance, due to its nature as a desiring being, and her account of an ethics based on sublimation form the basis for my theory of autonomy as a receptive ethical comportment. I will show how the subject demonstrating an autonomous comportment possesses the capacity to resist the potentially detrimental logics of collective society, not through isolation and a denial of vulnerability, but through an openness to those relations that both strengthen and weaken its coherence.

The descriptive "receptive" rather than "relational" best conveys the nature of the autonomous capacity I wish to portray. Whereas the term "relational"⁵² retains a connotation of inter-relation and might best describe a plurality of distinct, yet connected selves, "receptivity" gestures to the not necessarily willful porousness of the self relative to its internal and external otherness. The word "receptive" preserves a sense of receptivity's negation, that of the unaffected and resistant. The moving dynamic between responsiveness and impassiveness mirrors the self's tendency to affirm or to deny the risks of relationality, to allow or to disallow the impingement on or the extension of selfhood. I will show how these vacillating tendencies influence autonomous capacity—the self's

⁵² In chapter one, I discuss the work of feminists associated with the theory of "relational autonomy." This theory differs from mine in a number of ways.

capacity for resistance to normative social determination and the creation of new social possibilities.

Receptive autonomy denotes an ethics, a certain way of being toward otherness. Karan Barad's description of ethics as an "obligation to be responsive to the other, who is not entirely separate from what we call the self" (2012a, 69) echoes my understanding of receptive autonomy as a type of ethical comportment divergent from a more traditional understanding of ethics, which expresses a concern for the "right response to a radically exteriorized other" (Barad 2012a, 69). My notion of an ethical comportment of receptive autonomy as openness to otherness aligns with Barad's assessment that "ethicality entails noncoincidence with oneself" (Barad 2010, 265). The potential to embody an ethical comportment toward otherness arises in moments of heightened self-incoherence.

Receptive autonomy requires an attentiveness to the negativity and disruption that relationality entails. This disruptiveness does not refer to an interruption coming from outside the self nor to an interruption coming from inside the self. Rather, this disruptiveness erupts at the junction between these imagined boundaries, at the overlapping of a singular being and a social world, an overlapping that creates what Lacanian analysis calls the subject, and what I will refer to as the self. Receptive autonomy denotes a comportment of receptivity to the precarity of this contact between social world and singular being.

As I will convey, love tends to heighten the self's awareness of its volatile boundaries and thus encourages an attentiveness to the disjuncture between singular being and social meaning. Receptive autonomy is indebted to the disruptive nature of love, as love extricates the self from its comfortable seat in social identity. Loosened from the

determinants of social expectations, the self possesses the ability to perceive moments when social codes fail and reveal their limits and inconsistencies. In the space of such awareness, prevailing scripts appear less convincing and necessary. One becomes open to formulating and participating in innovative modes of political engagement. And this, as I will ultimately show in chapter four, paves the way for radical social change.

While my account of receptive autonomy shares with well-established understandings of autonomy the implication of autonomy's critical capacity, discernible in the self's ability to act in a manner undetermined by and critical of collective norms, it adds to this an element of creativity—the stipulation that autonomy entails the creation of new self/social laws. Receptive autonomy counters the image of autonomy as self-aware obedience to given communal laws, as self-containment, or as measured isolation. To the contrary, receptive autonomy, as a non-individualized comportment of autonomy, depends upon an unguarded self prepared to embrace the risks entailed in relationality and love.

Through Lacan and Lacanian feminists' theories of ethics, I specify how the self's porous relationship to otherness can enable an ethical comportment of receptive autonomy. The first portion of this chapter focuses on Lacan's theorization of subjectivity and desire as well as his understanding of sexual difference to clarify the importance of these concepts for his radical redefinition of ethics. Next, I explore how feminist Joan Copjec has taken up Lacan's theories of subjectivity, sexual difference, and ethics to propose a theory of ethical action dependent upon the disruptive force of love. Both Lacan and Copjec's theorizations of ethics draw from Sophocles's play *Antigone* and portray the character of Antigone as exemplifying ethical being. From these readings of *Antigone* and the ethical, as well as Alenka Zupančič's depiction of love, I distill the autonomy-generating

properties of a certain approach to otherness to present my own theory of receptive autonomy.

Lacan's Ruptured Subject

Central to my figuration of autonomous capacity is Lacan's theory of the subject as alienated from collective meaning. Lacan's account of subjectivity upsets the classical understanding of the subject as cogito, that is, as equivalent with conscious and intentional thought and action. Drawing from Freud the implications of the unconscious, Lacan suggests that the subject remains partially obscure or unknown to itself (1966, 694). While conscious thought presumes to comprise the totality of subjectivity, as a largely rational and reflective agency (the ego), unconscious thought processes continue to compose the other side of subjectivity, covertly informing the motives and actions of the subject.

The unconscious, comprised of scraps of language and images, draws these concepts from the world outside of the subject. As an agency unknown to consciousness, the unconscious comes into being through the "Other." In his use of the term "Other," the Other as language and image, Lacan means to suggest that the birth of the subject, the very ability to conceptualize, requires submission to the language of others, to what Lacan calls the symbolic order (Lacan 1966, 40, 708, 713). Lacan contends that once we have awakened to our compulsory acquiescence to the rule of language, "the symbol's order can no longer be conceived of...as constituted by man but must rather be conceived of as constituting him" (1966, 34). One becomes a subject only in being subjugated by language.

The subject's existence in language means that the words and phrases of others, the very stuff of conscious and unconscious thought, consistently feel somewhat strange or alien to the subject. There is always something that seems to elude the subject in its attempts to think and speak using the collective significations given in language. Lacan calls this something that resists symbolization and capture by cognition the "Real." The Real exists as "a confrontation with lack" (Lacan 113, 1998), a jarring sense that there is something lacking about our very being, something that we cannot express or even conceptualize. Since the Real indicates something that we think might exist outside of language, and thought must take place within language, only when thought and meaning overtly fail do we encounter the Real. When we come upon the unthinkable and the impossible, when we are unable to digest, explain, or make sense of an occurrence, we confront the Real.^{53, 54} For Lacan these encounters with the Real provide the possibility for ethical action. In subsequent sections of this chapter, I will discuss the ethical nature of a certain disposition toward the disruptive Real, how this disposition is engendered in love, and explain how such a disposition fosters autonomous capacity. For now, I will clarify how the subject's alienation in language forms the basis for social resistance.

⁵³ Bruce Fink explains how trauma is one instance that indicates an encounter with the Real. In trauma, the subject experiences a failure of meaning. The subject cannot make sense of, or integrate the traumatic experience; so, the presence of the Real, as a disruptive and indigestible fragment, haunts the post-traumatic subject. Fink explains that part of the goal of analysis is to get "the analysand to dream, daydream, and talk, however incoherently, about a traumatic 'event,'" to "make him or her connect it up with words, bring it into relation with even more signifiers" (1995, 26). In this process, the patient is hopefully able to more fully digest the experience, so that the residue of the Real ceases to act as a painful fixation.

⁵⁴ There has been much discussion concerning the political and ethical value of the concept of the Real. One can read through Butler and Žižek's extended debate on the topic in Butler's *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993) and in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues On the Left* (Butler, Laclau, and Žižek 2002).

Lacan illustrates the subject's divisive relationship with language by drawing out the split character of the subject as it becomes apparent in the very act of speaking. For instance, when I speak the sentence, "I am not going to get carried away," the "I" exists as something separate from the one speaking the sentence. The very act of designating an "I" in the statement gestures back to the one that enunciates the words of the sentence, but the "I" in the sentence cannot signify at the same time both the "I" that speaks and the "I" that is spoken of. As Lacan states, "there may be no signifier of the enunciating subject in the statement" (1966, 677). There are two elements to the subject here, one that presumes to know language, the "I", or ego, and one that cannot be named, but nevertheless exists. The relation between these two elements of an "I" sentence demonstrates "the subject's relation to the signifier—through an enunciation that makes a human being tremble due to the vacillation that comes back to him from his own statement" (Lacan 1966, 679). In speaking and referring back to ourselves, we must use a linguistic symbol, the "I." Yet, because this "I" is impersonal and can refer to any number of "I(s)," it fails to adequately refer back to the one enunciating the "I." Thus, in a sense, when we refer back to ourselves as an "I," we negate our particular existence; we forfeit our singularity to the language of the Other. As Lacan suggests, this negation implied in language is the point at which the subject shows itself. He states, "Being of non-being, that is how I comes on the scene as a subject who is conjugated with the double aporia of a veritable subsistence that is abolished by his knowledge, and by a discourse in which it is death that sustains existence" (Lacan 1966, 679). Herein lies the uneasy and split nature of the Lacanian subject in its place between the act of speaking and the act of negation that takes place in speaking.

The trick to all of this, is that there is no being outside of language for speaking beings. We think, speak, and relate to one another only through language. Thus, even the enunciator that cannot adequately refer back to itself exists in language. In every “I” sentence, there is an “I” and a “not I” who is “not exactly me.” Because the Other of language structures *both the conscious “I”* and the knowing enunciator who is barred from conscious thought as it is expressed in the sentence, *the unconscious “I”*, it would appear that Lacan, in posing a challenge to the cogito (subject as consciousness), has failed to allow for an agency outside of the determinates of the Other. Yet, the very brilliance of the Lacanian gesture of proposing a split subject lies in the radical form of potential freedom this split implies. The incompatibility between the unconscious and conscious aspects of subjectivity, both elaborated in language, creates a space—the very gap between the two—that is uninhabited by Otherness. The split itself cannot be recounted in language.

The enigmatic quality of the divided subject ensures that the subject’s desire, its sense of lack with respect to language, remains discordant with the desire of the Other. Although the subject desires through the language of the Other (“man’s desire is the Other’s desire” (Lacan 1966, 525)), the Other is also a lacking and desiring being. The subject arrives at “the constitutive structure of his desire in the gap opened up by the effect of signifiers in those who come to represent the Other for him” (Lacan 1966, 535). Because the subject desires by means of a lack coextensive, but not identical, with the lack in the Other, the subject retains a point of being, the point where desire lives, that remains free from circumscription in the language of Other.

Desire: The Failure of Language

For Lacan, desire lives in the gap between our embodied singularity, which is inexpressible in language, and our attempts to express our singularity in language. Language, as a communal creation, exists at a level of abstraction from singular being. Our existence in language ensures that there will be a disjuncture between what we communicate as our needs and what we need. Desire emerges in this ill-fit between our needs and our attempts to express these needs to others. Lacan explains, “desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand rips away from need, this margin being the one that demand...opens in the guise of the possible gap need may give rise to here, because it has no universal satisfaction” (1966, 689). Because there will never be a way to express in language the particularity of our needs, we remain unsatisfied beings. Desire emerges because language fails us. We remain desiring and lacking, unable even to fully comprehend our own being, as comprehension must take place in language.

This figuration of the subject as a lacking desiring being seems disempowering and unlikely to help ground a theory of the subject as capable of autonomy. However, as I will show, it is this very lack and instability, and even vulnerability to otherness (for Lacan this otherness is both language and that which exists in excess of language) that enables autonomous capacity. Desire, as that which emerges in the space of incompatibility between the subject’s singularity and the subject’s existence in language founds the basis of the subject’s freedom, its ability to act ethically and autonomously. As I will show, the subject’s capacity to follow desire corresponds to its capacity for autonomy.

Copjec explores, in more detail, this link between the subject's desire and the subject's potential freedom. She looks to Lacan's notion of the subject as alienated in language to describe the critical link between the subject's desire—an indication of its sense of lack with respect to meaning—and its capacity for social resistance (Copjec 1994, 37). Copjec appeals to the subversiveness of desire, as produced by the necessary failure of the social-symbolic to fully determine the self, as a counter to accounts such as Foucault and Butler's that insist on the social construction of both selves and desire.^{55, 56} In contrast, Copjec keeps open the space between the social law that calls forth the subject and the desire created by the inherent failure of the subject to comply with its subjectification under the social. The subject can never adequately comply with social norms, as these norms exist at a level of abstraction—at the level of meaning—from a singular embodied being. Because collective signification appears to fail in its aim to perfectly represent or reflect reality,⁵⁷ there is a sense that the social hides something, and "language can only ever present itself to the subject as a veil that cuts off from view a reality that is other than what we are allowed to see" (Copjec 1994, 54). This leads to "the belief that there is a

⁵⁵ Paul Eisenstein and Todd McGowan make a similar critique of Foucault. They suggest that while Foucault acknowledges the particular, the significance of the unique and the local, he ultimately "renounces the rupture that causes singularity to emerge" (2012, 167) in his historicist insistence that nothing escapes representation in history (2012, 166). In contrast, a Lacanian understanding of subjectivity invokes the singular—the unique gap produced by signification that ensures that the subject (the subject of history) is never truly encompassed by its representation.

⁵⁶ In *Precarious Life*, published after Copjec's book that I cite here, Butler does suggest, through Levinas, that subjectivity entails the failure of signification. She notes "the human cannot be captured through representation" (Butler 2004a, 145), and that the failure of representation is what truly captures reality. In this claim, she comes closer to the Lacanian understanding of subjectivity. In addition, in *The Psychic Life of Power* (also published after Copjec's *Read my Desire*), Butler moves "toward a psychoanalytic criticism of Foucault" (1997, 87), who she suggests fails to account for the subject's attachment to its own subjugation. Yet, in this work, Butler continues to claim that the psychic never exceeds the social (1997, 102).

⁵⁷ Shoshana Felman discusses how language "raises the question of its own limit;" that is, how it refers to its own inability to be everything (Felman 2003, 58), and thus to its inevitable failure to do what it intends. She suggests that language, as an act of failure, always produces an excess of what was intended. It is the force of this excess that modifies the real and subverts the coercive force of the discourse of the Other (Felman 2003).

reality lying behind language” (Copjec 1994, 55). This belief attests to the presence of desire, a longing for something more, a yearning for something other or different. This longing for a part of being beyond language engenders a sense of disjoint, a failure of identity with the demands of the social-symbolic. This gap, between collective meaning and all that this symbolic world cannot capture or express, is where desire resides as the subject’s summons to subversiveness.

The hysteric’s bodily experiences attest to that which social determination fails to capture. Freud defined the condition of hysteria, which he suggested was predominantly found in women, as the defensive conversion of unbearable thoughts or affects into physical symptoms (Freud 1912). In a feminist interpretation of the condition, one might conclude that the defensive actions of the hysteric mark her inability or refusal to fully comply with norms of femininity. In this reading, hysterical symptoms would arise due to the fact that the socially constructed body image of the hysteric, fashioned according to socially acceptable feminine characteristics, fails to match her embodied experiences. Copjec explains: “the fact that she is constructed by society’s language means *to the hysteric* that part of her body will *not* be visible, or present to her. The inert limbs and the facial paralyse of the hysterics are testimonies of a cut too often ignored by those who would turn Lacan’s theory into a linguistic or cultural determination” (Copjec 1994, 51). Quite to the contrary, one can see that, “hysteria is the first analyzed instance of the subject’s

essential division, its questioning and refusal of social dictates” (Copjec 1994, 51).^{58, 59} The hysteric’s desire is precisely to communicate to the Other that her desire remains unsatisfied.

Lacan suggests that Freud’s first hysteric patients revealed to him the limits of his own desire, his desire to explain hysteric pathology through scientific reasoning. In his failed initial attempts to arrive at an explanation for hysteria, Freud was faced with the inadequacy of the scientific method, and he began to comprehend the very nature of desire, that it remains always unsatisfied (Lacan 1981). It was “through this door that Freud entered what was, in reality, the relations of desire to language and discovered the mechanisms of the unconscious” (Lacan 1981, 12) Thus, Lacan explains, Freud arrives at the conclusion that “in order to cure the hysteric of all her symptoms, the best way is to satisfy her hysteric’s desire—which is for her to posit her desire in relation to us as an unsatisfied desire...” (1981, 12). The hysteric leads Freud to discover the realm of refused desire, the unconscious. From this point on, Lacan states, “what he [Freud] had learnt from his experience of the hysteric, he began to move forward with truly unprecedented boldness. What does he now tell us about the unconscious? He declares that it is constituted essentially, not by what the consciousness may evoke, extend, out of the subliminal, but by that which is, essentially, refused” (1981, 43). The unconscious ambulation of the hysteric’s limbs expresses a bodily exasperation at the social refusal of

⁵⁸ In keeping with Lacan’s understanding of hysteria, Žižek also interprets hysteria as an instantiation of symbolic failure and bodily resistance. He claims, “what is hysteria if not precisely the effect and testimony of a failed interpellation; what is the hysterical question if not an articulation of the incapacity of the subject to fulfill the symbolic identification, to assume fully and without restraint the symbolic mandate?” (Žižek 1989, 126).

⁵⁹ John Rajchman reads hysteria as an explicitly ethical defiance of normative medicine: “In her sexuality, the hysteric was a defiance of the ‘mastery’ of medicine, its claim to know what was good for her” (1991, 24).

her desire. In opposition to arguments that might suggest that Lacan's vision of subjectivity conveys an understanding of the subject as determined by the discourse of the Other, in the instance of his reading of the hysteric, we begin to see the radically undetermined and incomplete nature of the self's subjectification in the social and the potential the self has to engage this incompleteness, its desire, for the purposes of social resistance.

The hysteric's symptoms attest to the psychoanalytic insight that what the social historical production of subjectivity ensures is that the subject remains always alienated from the language of the social as a whole. This sense of alienation incites in the subject a longing for something that language might conceal, a "desire for nonbeing, for an *indeterminate* something that is perceived as *extradiscursive*" (Copjec 1994, 56). The alienated split subject is potentially autonomous precisely because it is endowed with the ethical capacity to follow desire, desire being that which the social can neither adequately represent nor fulfill. This disjoint between the social and the self creates the conditions for an ethical autonomous comportment of following desire. But, it is, as I will show, an ethics of criminal love that actually sets in motion the embodiment of receptive autonomy.

Sexual Difference and Feminine Ethos

Lacan's theories of subjectivity and ethics cannot be separated from his notion of sexuation, the creation of the sexed subject through its positioning in relation to the signifier. Lacan's concept of sexual difference has been extensively critiqued, praised, and reformulated by feminists. Feminist engagement with Lacan's work has proven profoundly fruitful, leading to significant conceptualizations and critiques of his theory of sexual

difference.⁶⁰ In the following, I return to Lacan for the feminist potential behind his conviction that ethics aligns with the feminine. I will outline the fundamental aspects of Lacan's theory of sexual difference to clarify how a notion of ethics derived from the feminine position does not entail a naturalization of gender or sexuality, but rather forms a basis for the critique and dissolution of these types of normalizations.⁶¹

Rather than a depiction of the supposed dissimilarities between the biological categories of "man" and "woman," Lacan's account of sexed-existence must be read as an articulation of the impossibility of ever fully accounting for oneself and for one's relationship to other beings. The notions of the "masculine" and the "feminine" relate to positions taken with respect to the signifier, the instantiation of the subject in language. Lacan and close followers of Lacan refuse to abide by conventions that suggest that these positions correspond to anatomy. Rather, their work attests to the fragile and always miscarried nature of sexed positions.

For Lacan, the idea of a perfect unification between the feminine and the masculine remains an impossible idea. The impossible nature of a sexual relationship stems not from biological difference, but from the divided nature of subjectivity (1998). The split subject emerges through the alienation that occurs due to the otherness of language and through the infant's separation from prior unity with a primary caretaker. This division, or castration as Lacan calls it, causes the subject to associate being with loss, and, at the same

⁶⁰ The feminist psychoanalytic theorists involved are too numerous to list, but important texts in this area include: See: Brennan (1992); Gallop (1982, 1985); Irigaray (1985a, 1985b, 1993); Kristeva (1982); Lacan and Mitchell (1982); Mitchell (2000); Soler (2006); Rose (2011)

⁶¹ Butler has amended her numerous and important critiques of Lacan's notion of sexual difference over the years, conceding that sexual difference is not inherently essentialist. Yet, she still cautions against what she sees as the reifying heteronormative effects of the formulation (Butler 2004b; Butler, Laclau, and Žižek 2000).

time, to imagine a period of prior wholeness, a time before its separation from infantile completeness and its division in language. Lacan calls this imagined fullness, this idea of absolute satisfaction prior to the subject's emergence as a thinking being, *jouissance*.⁶²

The phallus, culturally valued as that which is meant to unify one with another, to mitigate loss, and as that which recalls the incompleteness of subjectivity in its function as unifier, comes to signify lack and the loss of *jouissance* experienced by all subjects alienated in language. In this sense, "the signifier [phallus] is the cause of *jouissance*" and "what brings *jouissance* to a halt" (Lacan 1998, 24). The phallus both creates the possibility of *jouissance* and imposes a limit on its realization.

Subjects in the feminine position find themselves lacking the phallus, the signifier of loss and of possible fullness, and thus maintain no illusions about a return to wholeness. As Lacan states, "woman is defined by a position...indicated as 'not whole' with respect to phallic *jouissance*" (1998, 7). Existing in a position of lack due to phallic convention, woman might come to desire the social power of the phallus, the imagined strength that might be gained in attaining it through partnership with a man.⁶³ Or, in a more subversive formation of desire, she might follow her feminine *jouissance*, the inexpressible fullness that exists beyond the phallus, a fullness open only to woman, who remains Other with respect to the phallic function that limits *jouissance* (Lacan 1998, 74).⁶⁴

⁶² Lacan's notion of *jouissance* does not translate aptly into English. It loosely denotes a pleasure beyond pleasure, a pleasure that is terrifying and transgressive (1992, 184-5; 194). My use of *jouissance* here parallels Kristeva's conception of the word. She suggests that *jouissance* is that which the subject both fears and desires, the disintegration of the boundaries of the subject that would result from extreme enjoyment (Kristeva, 1982).

⁶³ In modern clinical diagnosis, those who express a hysteric personality structure are said to exhibit this tendency (Williams 1994).

⁶⁴ As Bruce Fink and others have pointed out, the Other *jouissance*, in contrast to phallic *jouissance*, is a loving and embodied *jouissance* (Fink 1995, 120). Said differently, phallic *jouissance* hinges on lack and defensive fantasies of the potential fullness to be found in uniting with a subject in the feminine position (Lacan 1998, 78-89). In contrast, feminine

From the masculine position, the phallus, while still signifying lack, is imagined as something that can be obtained. Woman, because she lacks the phallus, becomes the missing phallus for man. She comes to represent, rather than a real partner, a fantasy of lost fullness that man seeks to acquire in partnering with her (Lacan 1998, 72). In this pattern of desire, man imagines a completeness of subjectivity, while woman, knowing that she is lacking, actually edges closer to freedom from the determinates of the symbolic by embracing her inarticulable nature as a “not-whole” subject.

This binary— the One (man) and the Other (woman)—does not actually correspond with anatomy but, rather, reflects the failure of language. The endurance of this binary arises from the fact that sexual difference is a function of language, a function of how the subject emerges through alienation and separation. As Colette Soler indicates, the weight of the phallic endures; “avoiding it is impossible for anyone who speaks as such; as soon as the signifier is in the Other of discourse, the phallus is in play...” (2006, 31). Yet, because the subject’s division in language is simply symbolically grafted onto the phallus, sexual difference does not entail a reification of sex-roles. Rather, the paradigm of sexual difference lends itself to a deep critique of biologically-based sexual difference. Lacan’s understanding of sexuation expresses “a more radical desubstantialization of sex, a greater subversion of its conception as substance, than the one attempted by the Butler position” (Copjec 2000, 207). According to the theory of sexual difference, sex is not an incomplete symbolic process of subjectification. It is not “something that communicates itself to

jouissance partially escapes the limiting nature of the phallus, and is thus seen as excessive and indecent. It is also, accordingly, associated with the body and that which escapes the reach of the signifier (Lacan 1998, 7-9).

others” (Copjec 2000, 207), as Butler understands it.⁶⁵ Instead, sex, inaugurated by the loss incurred in language, “is disjoined from the signifier, it becomes that which does not communicate itself, that which marks the subject as unknowable” (Copjec 2000, 207). In patriarchal cultures, this unknowable aspect of subjectivity is tied to the subject’s relationship to the phallus, which is valued as a symbol of loss and potential fullness.⁶⁶ This dynamic explains the relation of the One and the Other to language. The One is the subject supposed to know, and the Other is the unknowable.

Lacan emphasizes that while unification between the sexual poles is desired, it is impossible, because man as One and woman as Other exist in different positions with respect to the phallic function. They do not form a complement but rather exist in a non-relation propelled by the desire for unification that always misfires (Lacan 1966, 720; 1998). The impossibility of the sexual relationship lies in the different relationship the One and the Other have with respect to language. They always miss one another, yet the compulsion to cover over this difference with fantasies of harmony and wholeness persists. Lacan characterizes such fantasies as fantasies of love. I will later show how Copjec and Zupančič reject this characterization of love, in favor of approaching the valuation of love from the perspective of the feminine, from a subject position that tends away from fantasies of completion and wholeness.

⁶⁵ While Butler does describe sex as something iterated and communicated in *Gender Trouble* (Butler 1990), in her later work she expresses an appreciation for Luce Irigaray’s reading of Lacanian sexual difference. (Butler 2004b). In *Undoing Gender*, published after Copjec’s work that I cite above, Butler suggests that Irigaray reads sexual difference “...as a question that prompts a feminist inquiry, it is something that cannot quite be stated that troubles the grammar of the statement, and that remains, more or less permanently, to interrogate” (2004b, 178). Here, Butler expresses an appreciation for a Lacanian understanding of sexual difference that diverges, to some extent, from her earlier critiques of sexual difference as a problematically universalizing and stifling structural framing that “suppresses the subversive multiplicity of a sexuality that disrupts heterosexual, reproductive, and medicojuridical hegemonies” (Butler 1990, 26).

⁶⁶ Berlant explains: “For Lacan...sexual difference is organized not around the penis and the vagina, but the *gendering of anxiety*. Neither the male or the female ever ‘possesses’ the phallus: it can only represent loss and desire” (2012, 57).

Lacan's notion of sexed subjectivity directly supports his subversive account of ethics. To begin with, Lacan seems to suggest, in his reading of *Antigone*, that the feminine subject has a closer relationship to the ethical. In his reading of *Antigone* (Lacan, 1992) as well as in his description of women mystics (Lacan 1998, 76), the ethical act appears as feminine because the feminine place entails an awareness about being's incomplete nature, the reality that the subject is never whole or masterful. Lacan implies that because ethical action necessitates an affirmation of the disjuncture between fantasies of symbolic wholeness and actual embodied existence, woman, the incarnation of all that is incomplete and enigmatic from the masculine perspective, has easier entrée into the dominion of the ethical.

Yet, Lacan's insinuations concerning the link between ethics and the feminine require clarification. As Copjec explains, "Lacan must be understood to be making a claim about ethics in general...rather than proposing a separate ethics of the feminine" (2002, 7) or suggesting that women are inherently more ethical. She contends: "If it is woman who is privileged in Lacan's analysis this is because she remains closer to the truth of being..." (Copjec 2002, 7), as symbolically, she is called to inhabit the position of the not-all of being.⁶⁷ In this assessment, Copjec takes seriously Lacan's assertion that "woman does not exist" (Copjec 2002, 9), and rather than decrying the anti-feminist surface value of such a statement, she suggests that this sentiment alludes to a particularly psychoanalytic conception of being that challenges a masculine depiction of masterful subjectivity. In

⁶⁷ Žižek, with his trademark cheekiness, professes a man "is a woman who believe she exists" (Zupančič 2000, 133).

defying this latter normative account of subjectivity, the psychoanalytic picture of the subject also serves to unravel traditional notions of the ethical.

Lacan links the symbolically feminine position to ethical action through his assertion that ethics entails an affirmation of disruptive breaches in the symbolic order, of encounters that challenge fantasies of self-sovereignty. Thus, the ethical step forward from the purview of sexual difference lies in the valuation of the possibilities emerging from the feminine position. As Lacan remarks, introducing his lecture topic but also possibly alluding to the radically ethical nature of the feminine, “it is on the basis of the elaboration of the not-whole that one must break new ground” (1998, 57). Rather than resulting from the perpetuation of a fantasy of masculine subjectivity as complete, ethical agency lies in the incompleteness of the feminine position, in valuing that which sense and signification fail to convey.

Herein lies the importance of the Lacanian emphasis on the ethical nature of the feminine Other for my elaboration of autonomous capacity. I will show how the ethical move of facing the disruptive elements of existence—those moments when signification openly falters—inheres in a certain loving comportment. In opening to the unsettling forces of love, which shake the self from its social-symbolic bonds, from its very identity as a social being, the self attains a capacity for critical resistance to the social and the ability to creatively and autonomously enact new forms of relationality.

Lacan's Ethics: *Antigone* and Autonomy

Lacan's theory of ethics, as presented in his reading of *Antigone*, and Copjec's vision of an ethics of love as sublimation form the basis for my notion of receptive autonomy. I will first turn to Lacan's *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* to highlight his radical departure from a traditional philosophical approach to ethics and will then, in the sections that follow, look to the implications of this departure for my own articulation of autonomy as linked to love from the feminine position.

I start by revisiting Lacan's notorious and much discussed reading of Sophocles's play *Antigone* (Lacan 1992; Sophocles 1996). While the limited scope of this chapter prevents a full discussion of the myriad readings of the play and of Lacan's interpretation, I will briefly address Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim* (2000). In chapter four, I will consider Bonnie Honig's *Antigone, Interrupted* (2013), to explore Honig's contestation of Butler's later use of Antigone as a humanist figure of vulnerability and mourning. Both Butler and Honig take issue with Lacan's interpretation of the play for different reasons.

In her reading of *Antigone*, Butler contends that Antigone's existence illustrates the dehumanizing effects of the kinship law instantiated by the incest taboo (2000, 23). Butler suggests that because Antigone is the daughter of an incestuous union between Oedipus and Jocasta (Oedipus's mother), she has no intelligible position within the symbolic, which demands the observance of the incest taboo. Antigone's very existence challenges kinship norms within the social symbolic (2000, 24).⁶⁸ In addition, Antigone's defiance of the state,

⁶⁸ Terrell Carver and Samuel A. Chambers enrich Butler's reading of Antigone as a figure who challenges kinship norms by highlighting the ways in which Butler's theory "reveals the blind spots" of the liberal notion of tolerance. They suggest that an unintelligible figure like Antigone could not actually be tolerated, as she exists outside the realm of the recognizably human (2007).

expressed by her refusal to follow her uncle Creon's orders not to bury her brother who has died as an enemy of the state, signifies an aberrant and subversive claim for political justice.

Because Butler reads Antigone's actions as taking place within the terms of the social symbolic, as deviant rearticulations of these norms, she rejects Lacan's reading of Antigone as a figure who partially slips away from the confines of language itself (Butler 2000, 53-55). Rather, Butler suggests that Lacan's notion of the symbolic— as an unalterable legal structure of kinship established through the incest taboo—serves to reify what are actually alterable social institutions (2000, 20-21). While Butler briefly addresses Lacan's central claim that symbolic law always fails to fully capture social existence, she ultimately rejects this claim finding it not conducive to projects of social change and thus politically unproductive and even potentially dangerous.^{69, 70} Contrary to Butler's conclusions concerning Lacan's work, in my return to Lacan, I will show how his reading of *Antigone* presents a politically valuable notion of ethical action—an ethics that enables rejections and revisions of social meaning.

While many theorists, Honig in particular, question the value of returning to *Antigone* or interpretations of *Antigone* to theorize ethics and politics (Honig 2013), I find it expedient to continue to interrogate Lacanian interpretations of the play for their novel

⁶⁹ Cecilia Sjöholm contests Butler's assertion that psychoanalysis problematically reifies social structures. She reads *Antigone* through the lens of psychoanalysis to challenge the heteronormative Oedipus Complex and offer an alternative, the "Antigone Complex." In this endeavor she additionally defends the radical and ethical nature of Lacan's notion of desire (Sjöholm 2002).

⁷⁰ Moya Lloyd highlights Butler's lack of attentiveness to the fallibility of state law. She suggests that because Butler does not fully capture the significance of Creon's failure to compel Antigone to obey state law, she misses the potentially progressive potential of appeals to the state. Lloyd concludes that because state speech, like all speech, is vulnerable to rearticulations (in line with Butler's own theory of performativity), it is not an inherently oppressive arena for democratic contention (Lloyd 2005).

and revolutionary exploration of ethics.^{71, 72} As Paul Allen Miller notes, the text of the play itself tends to resist our attempts to domesticate it “to norms of intelligibility,” (2007a, 2) to find a lasting and valid interpretation of its meaning. It is in the text’s many contradictions “the ways in which it transcends our normative canons of the good, the true, and the beautiful” (Miller 2007a, 2) that one finds an insurrectionary depiction of ethics as the disruption and subversion of settled ways of thinking and acting. I will show how Lacan’s reading of the play, precisely due to its insurrectionary bent, remains of crucial importance for a feminist reflection on autonomy and ethics. His portrayal of Antigone as a desiring, stubborn, and autonomous heroine works to counter masculine depictions of free agency as tied to individual power.^{73, 74}

In his exegesis of the play and its reception in canonical philosophy, Lacan claims that Hegel mistakenly construes *Antigone* as a moral tale about the inherent and tragic conflict between differing orders of law, between the law of the state, the human, man, and the universal, as embodied by Creon, and the law of the family, the divine, woman, and the particular, as personified by Antigone. In Hegel’s account, both Antigone and Creon’s actions fall in line with *one* order of law, thereby necessarily violating the opposing order.

⁷¹ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe gives an excellent account of the importance of continuing to read *Antigone* through Lacan for the purposes of ethical considerations in “On Ethics: A propos of Antigone” (1991).

⁷² Žižek’s work contains many references to Antigone as a revolutionary ethical figure, see: (Žižek 2000b, 2001a, 2001b, 2006, 2010).

⁷³ While both Nietzsche and Foucault, in his later work, offer embodied theories of free agency that counter rationalist and abstract enlightenment accounts of the free self, I contend that they both still remain trapped within a masculine discourse of individualism and power in their respective works on the self as an artistic creation and on the arts of self-cultivation.

⁷⁴ Jodi Dean notes that psychoanalysis uniquely recognizes that subjectivity is not synonymous with individuality (2016, 367).

Hegel sees Creon and Antigone's respective actions, one following human law, the other divine law, as the actions that eventually allow self-consciousness to realize that the essence of both laws "is the unity of both; but the deed has only carried out one law in contrast to the other" (Hegel 1977, § 469). Hegel states:

The movement of the ethical powers against each other and of the individualities calling them into life and action have attained their true end only insofar as both sides suffer the same destruction. For neither power has any advantage over the other that would make it a more essential moment of substance. The equal essentiality of both and their indifferent existence alongside each other means that they are both without self. In the deed they exist as beings with a self, but with a diverse self; and this contradicts the unity of the self, and constitutes their unrighteousness and unnecessary destruction (Hegel 1977, § 472).

Hegel finds that Antigone and Creon are equally guilty of violating one law in favor of the other, thereby breaking up the unity of the self that might act in a fully realized ethical manner. Lacan rebukes Hegel's account of mutual culpability, and instead suggests that Creon plays the unethical actor precisely because he assumes the unity and coherence of a single notion of the good (Lacan 1992, 258). In contrast, Antigone is the ethical autonomous heroine because she refuses to believe that there is one good that might reign above all others. Antigone rejects the very notion of a common good and instead affirms her brother's criminality, his incomprehensibility to the particular vision of the good put forward by the community (as represented by the figure of Creon) (Lacan 283, 1992).

Lacan's counter to Hegel's interpretation of *Antigone*, as a tale of mutual culpability ending in a sublation toward a higher form of ethical life, illustrates how he breaks with a liberal Kantian understanding of the ethical as dutifully acting in accordance with moral law.⁷⁵ Lacan draws our attention to tragedy, specifically *Antigone*, to show how it reveals

⁷⁵ See chapters one and four for non-liberal readings of Kant that draw out his work's affinities with Lacanian ethics.

the contradiction inherent in a certain rendering of Kantian morality.^{76, 77} He begins by explaining how Creon acts “in perfect conformity with that which Kant calls the *Bergiff* or concept of the good” (Lacan 1992, 259). Creon’s “refusal to allow a sepulcher for Polyneices, who is an enemy and a traitor to his country, is founded on the fact that one cannot at the same time honor those who have defended their country and those who have attacked it” (Lacan 1992, 259). Lacan notes that Creon’s decision to deny Polyneices (an enemy of the state) a burial follows Kant’s categorical imperative; his “is a maxim that can be given as a rule of reason with a universal validity” (1992, 259). However, in seeking to “promote the good of all” (Lacan 1992, 259), in following the demands of what Hegel would call human law, Creon implicates himself in a tragic chain of events. His wife, his son, and Antigone all suffer and ultimately perish due to his attempts to seek the good for all. Lacan claims that this “spectacle of tragedy,” shows that “the good cannot reign over all without an excess emerging whose fatal consequences are revealed to us in tragedy” (1992, 259). Tragedy exposes the contradiction inherent in the imperative to follow moral law, that in seeking a universal morality, one submits to the law of the Other, to the laws of a community, a god, or a philosophy. If one seeks the good of all, one must assume an “all” with no limits. Yet, if one is to act on behalf of a good, one must limit, must define this good in language.

⁷⁶ Lacan is anything but dismissive of Kant. He actually sees Kant as enacting a radical break with traditional ethics in his claim that moral law has nothing to do with the pleasure and happiness of the subject (1992, 315-16). I discuss Lacan’s reading of Kant in chapter one.

⁷⁷ Miller suggests that Antigone’s actions *would* align with a Lacanian reading of Kantian ethics, but that her actions would not align with a strict Kantian notion of ethics. Regarding Antigone’s action, Miller states, “such an ethical choice, as Lacan implicitly acknowledges, is Kantian in its devotion to a pure concept of duty, but psychoanalytic in its predication on a highly individualized desire that cannot be generalized, with regard to its content, into a universal ethical maxim of the kind Kant required” (2007b, 83).

Lacan suggests that this pursuit of the good as a means to human happiness and wellbeing is the primary concern of traditional ethics. He states “from the origin of moral philosophy, from the moment when the term ethics acquired the meaning of man's reflection on his condition and calculation of the proper paths to follow, all meditation on man's good has taken place as a function of the index of pleasure” (Lacan 1992, 221). Finding this traditional notion of ethics problematic for its insistence on universality and its unconvincing promise of pleasure, Lacan offers an entirely different and explicitly antinomian account of the ethical.

Lacan contends that the ethical act is one in which the actor remains autonomous with respect to moral commands and refuses to sacrifice her desire, the very essence of being, for the pursuit of the good, be it her own good or the good of another. For Lacan, desire drives our very existence. It is the lack introduced by language, which propels being in its incessant search for satisfaction. Formed in the gap between needs and the articulation of these needs (the demands one addresses to the other), desire emerges from the very otherness of language. Because language comes to the self as Other, the demands one makes always introduce a disjoint between what they intend and what they say. Desire lives in this disjoint, as a longing for a satisfaction consistent with what is inexpressible in language. Lacan writes, “in every satisfaction of a need, it [desire] insists on something else; that the satisfaction formulated spreads out and conforms to this gap; that desire is formed as something supporting this metonym, namely, as something the demand means beyond whatever it is able to formulate” (Lacan 1992, 294). Unrelenting desire, constituted by lack, could only ever be imagined as satisfied from a standpoint where desire no longer reigns,

from the point of view of death. Accordingly, desire spreads on and on searching for gratification thus subtending existence.

Desire, as the very “metonym of our being” (Lacan 1992, 321) persists, even when the demands of moral law inevitably order its dismissal. Lacan explains, “the service of goods, that is the position of traditional ethics” mandates “the cleaning up of desire, modesty, temperateness” (1992, 314). Traditional morality contends, ““as far as desires are concerned, come back later. Make them wait”” (Lacan 1992, 315). Morality in its conventional form was measured; it “concerned itself with what one was supposed to do ‘insofar as it is possible’” (Lacan 1992, 314). This form of morality aimed to maximize universal wellbeing by proffering a path of moderation—a steady pursuit of socially desirable possibilities for the good of all. In contrast, Lacan’s notion of ethics, premised on desire, demands the impossible; it demands that we follow our desire, as desire heightens our attunement to the possibilities lying beyond the pale of the socially possible.

Lacan’s notion of ethics problematizes traditional morality’s attempted deflection of desire because, to attempt to repel the pursuit of desire is to attempt (unsuccessfully) to avert the singularity of being. Desire derives from our unique form of alienation from collective meaning; it is “that which roots us in a particular destiny...in a given track, the track of something that is specifically our business” (Lacan 1992, 319). If one makes a sacrifice relative to desire, for example, to tolerate a betrayal (as Antigone might have done had she allowed her beloved brother to remain unburied), “one gives ground to the point of giving up one’s own claims and says to oneself, ‘Well, if that’s how things are, we should abandon our positions; neither of us is worth that much, and especially me, so we should just return to the common path’” (Lacan 1992, 321). Following the *common path of moral*

law expresses “contempt for the other and for oneself” (Lacan 1992, 321). As I suggest, in my reading of John Rawls in chapter one, this pursuit of the common path, endemic to liberalism’s notion of harmonious pluralism, actually forestalls the capacity for autonomy by denying desire—the singularity of the subject, its specific form of alienation from collective meaning.⁷⁸

Lacan concludes that in seeking the common good, what traditional ethics defines as ethical and what liberal theorists like Rawls appear to endorse as ethical, one actually dismisses desire, the subject’s uniqueness of being, and thus acts unethically.⁷⁹ Rather than seeing obedience to the moral law, envisioned as a law that demands the pursuit of the good of all, as the apotheosis of autonomy, as some readers of Kant might suggest, Lacan alludes to how such conduct actually entails a sacrifice of the subject’s capacity for autonomy.

Copjec, in keeping with Lacan, reads the coercive nature of moral law, imagined as the pursuit of a common good, as a hindrance to ethical autonomous action. The moral law that commands: “everyone must act in the same way...loses its ethical connotation” (Copjec 2002, 17), if the proscribed manner of acting means acting in accordance with a decision arrived at through rational deliberation over the given circumstances of a situation. In this instance, the *must* in the commandment of this law is “guided by, rather than independent

⁷⁸ Miller reminds us that, for Lacan, singularity is not synonymous with individualism. He states “the ethics of psychoanalysis is always and only realized in relation to a precise and historically located other” (2007b, 97). This is due to the fact that singularity results from a historically specific form of alienation from common meaning. He explains: “Antigone’s desire is authentic only to the extent that it is unique, and it is unique only in its simultaneous relation to and constitution by the Other (Creon, the *polis*, the Law, etc.)” (2007b, 97-98).

⁷⁹ Lacan states: “The good as such—something that has been the eternal object of the philosophical quest in the sphere of ethics, the philosopher’s stone of all the moralists—the good is radically denied by Freud” (1992, 98). Freud’s rejection of the notion that traditional morality aligns with pleasure and happiness appears in his positing of the superego (conscience) as the eternalized law of an authoritative father that forbids one to freely pursue all outlets of sexual pleasure.

of, external sanction” (Copjec 2002, 17). This reading of the Kantian imperative, as a moral law ordering one to submit to a communal vision of what reason entails, actually subjugates the subject from within.⁸⁰ Acting in accordance with moral law, in this sense, means complying with the law of the community as internalized in the superego. This path of obeisance to the common renders the actor coerced, unfree, and unethical. For both Lacan and Copjec, it is precisely only an autonomous act, an act that diverges from established modes of being, that can surpass the coercive force of social law and thus be deemed ethical.

An act of genuflection to the demands of a generalizable moral law, the total sacrifice of the self’s worth, invariably ends in tragedy, as we see in Hegel’s reading of *Antigone*, and in Lacan’s characterization of Creon. According to both Hegel and Lacan, Creon remains ethically suspect. According to Hegel, Creon violates divine law by seeking to uphold human law, and according to Lacan, he gives ground relative to his desire, in an attempt to act for the good of all. Yet, while Hegel views Antigone as equally suspect, as equally guilty—in violation of human law in her obedience to divine law—Lacan maintains that Creon alone is guilty. The ethical actor, Lacan insists, is Antigone, who persists in her autonomy, following her desire and refusing to situate her actions with respect to any order of law.

Contrary to Hegel’s reading of Antigone as siding with the law of the family and the divine, Lacan claims that Antigone is autonomous because she refuses to act on behalf of any order of law. She is *beyond* law. Antigone moves into “a place where she feels herself to

⁸⁰ In chapter one, I argue that this reading of Kant’s moral law, as the pursuit of the universal good in terms of an adherence to an empirical vision of the categorical imperative (a reading that aligns with Rawls’s interpretation of Kant), actually de-realizes the more radical theory of autonomy implicit in Kant’s ethics.

be unassailable, a place where it is impossible for a mortal being...to go beyond...the laws” (Lacan 1992, 278). Antigone refuses to conjecture about the legality of her act with reference to divine or human law, claiming “I’m not going to get mixed up in it; I’m not concerned with all these gods below who have imposed laws on men” (Lacan 1992, 278). Antigone insists that her ethical act, the burial of her brother Polyneices, might not accord with the law of the family, nor the law of the gods, and most certainly not with the law of the State, as Creon has explicitly forbidden the burial of Polyneices. Antigone resolutely confirms the contingent legality of her actions according to divine law and affirms that she is not concerned with the law’s judgment of her actions, whether her acts will be deemed just or unjust. She claims:

What ordinance, what law of heaven broken, what god left me to cast my eyes toward, when sacraments must now be damned as sacrilege? And if these things be smiled upon by heaven, why, when I’m dead I’ll know I sinned. But if I find the sin was theirs, may Justice then mete out no less to them than what injustice now metes out to me—my doom” (Sophocles 1996, 232).

As I will show, it is Antigone’s conformity to the path of her singular desire, her refusal of all orders of law established by the Other, by god or by man, that renders her deed, the burial of her criminalized brother, both ethical and autonomous in nature. It is precisely because desiring is always to desire the impossible that the path of desire ensures our autonomy—our ability to exist in singularity, in deviation from the path of the common. The way of love, like the path of desire, moves us away from the confines of the socially possible and toward a comportment of autonomy.

Joan Copjec: Love as Sublimation

Copjec suggests that it is precisely Antigone's *love* for her brother that engenders her autonomy, her ability to affirm the singularity of her brother and transcend the limits of communal law. Copjec turns to Lacan to give an account of love, different from Lacan's own, that indicates what I will describe as love's autonomy-generating potential. Copjec's conception of love as an act of sublimation, a sublimation of the demands of communal meaning, demonstrates how love encourages a comportment of receptive autonomy

Copjec's account of ethical love as sublimation differs from one of Lacan's better-known descriptions of love. Lacan describes "courtly love" as an idealization of the loved object, which acts as a *substitute* for the longed for Thing (1992, 139-154). In this type of love, a type of love that I believe is explicitly masculine,⁸¹ the object's actuality is effaced in the presence of the lover's idealizing gaze. Exemplified in the courtship between knight and lady, yet persisting in contemporary forms of love, courtly love derives from the masculine wish for harmony that is prevented by the impossible nature of the sexual relationship (Lacan 1998, 86-87). In the quest for fullness, for a repair to the rift in subjectivity, man imagines woman as lost fullness, as the inaccessible maternal Thing that is both desirable and terrifying. Woman comes to embody this inhuman fullness for man (Lacan 1992, 150). This courtship lacks any form of symmetry or recognition of the woman's particularity. She remains for the man solely a lost part of himself rather than an actual subject of desire (Lacan 1992, 149). The terrifying nature of the fullness that woman might generate is kept

⁸¹ While I do not have space to address this claim in detail, I do believe that there is truth to feminist critiques of Lacan that suggest that he is myopically situated within the realm of the masculine. I do not believe, however, that he would deny this. See: Flax's *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (1990) and Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a).

at bay by the expectation that she is to remain forever unapproachable. Lacan stresses, that woman as object, “is not simply inaccessible, but is also separated from him who longs to reach it by all kind of evil powers” (1992, 151). This accounts for the trials imposed upon a knight who seeks to win a lady’s favor. In this sense, love in the masculine position retains the character of narcissistic idealization and the effacement of feminine subjectivity.

Lacan contends that courtly love exemplifies sublimation (1992, 112, 128). His claims seem to suggest— in contrast to Copjec’s own reading of his work—that sublimation entails the effacement of the real loved object and its elevation as a substitute for an idealized lost part of a potentially full subjectivity. Explicitly tying together sublimation and love as illusion, Lacan appears to largely dismiss the ethical or feminist potential of love. Yet, I find that it is not love in every aspect that Lacan dismisses, but *love from the masculine position*. For Lacan, it is the love that springs from a desire for wholeness that remains ethically suspect.

Starting from the feminine position, both Copjec and Zupančič turn Lacan’s notion of love away from its implications of deception and egoism. Their work suggests an ethics based on love not as illusory and idealizing, but as relational and generative of autonomy. Copjec, in her vision of love as a function of sublimation, dispels the notion that love is a valid means for achieving harmony, in keeping with Lacan, but also the notion that love derives from a narcissistic arelational desire to attain completeness through the use of the other. Rather, as will be discussed in the fourth chapter, Copjec insists that love is indeed a narcissistic phenomenon, but one of a peculiarly relational and self-actualizing nature. In this chapter, however, I focus primarily on the autonomy-generating potential of love as sublimation.

Copjec develops her notion of love from Lacan's characterization of the death drive as always aligned with sublimation. For Lacan, in contrast to Freud who at times discerns the existence of both a death drive and a life instinct, there is but one *drive*, the death drive. Freud suggests that the death drive, the compulsion to return to a state prior to life, reveals the conservative nature of all instincts. Instincts follow inertia; they all "tend towards the restoration of an earlier state of things" (Freud 1989, 44). In psychoanalysis, this primordial pre-self state is understood as the "mother-child dyad, which supposedly contained all things and every happiness..." (Copjec 2002, 33). The drive would seemingly compel the self to commit suicide and seek death in all manner of ways, or as Freud would suggest in the self's particular way of choice, in an effort to return to a state of pre-subjectivity. However, this simplistic characterization of the drive, Lacan argues, misses the central importance of the paradox of the death drive. The paradox entails that the achievement of the drive's aim (death) would destroy the drive's satisfaction. The drive itself would be abolished along with the annihilation of the subject. Accordingly, "the drive achieves its satisfaction by *not* achieving its aim" (Copjec 2002, 30). In this sense, sublimation, defined as "the satisfaction of the drive through the inhibition of its aim," "is not something that happens to the drive under special circumstances; it is the proper destiny of the drive" (Copjec 2002, 30). While the drive aims at a lost maternal unity to be obtained in death, something must interfere to prevent the achievement of this aim. Yet, this something must also provide for the drive's satisfaction, if the movement of the death drive is to be characterized as a true form of sublimation. If reaching its aim cannot satisfy the death drive, what then satisfies it?

Copjec argues that the drive does indeed achieve satisfaction in a very peculiar way. The drive's ability to reach satisfaction hinges on the fact "that there is no single, complete drive, only partial drives, and thus no realizable will to destruction" (Copjec 2002, 34). The multiplicity of the drive and the existence of objects littering the field of its trajectory provide the conditions for the drive's, at least partial, satiation. The drive's compulsion toward death is interrupted by the unexpected seemingly mundane objects that appear in its path.

As an object appears before the death drive, it acts as an obstacle, both blocking the drive from achieving its aim of self-annihilation and breaking the drive up into partial drives. These partial drives then seek to "content themselves with...small nothings...objects that satisfy them" (Copjec 2002, 33). The drive would seem to be indifferent to these objects, content to use them purely as a source of satisfaction, as the libidinal instinct is satisfied by the arbitrary use of an object for the purposes of release. Yet, this is not the case with the drive. The objects here take on an altogether different character once enmeshed in relation to the drive.

The drive and its objects enter into an extraordinary relationship of mutual transubstantiation by means of sublimation. As the drive continues to circle the object, a "reversal of the common understanding of sublimation" occurs (Copjec 2002, 37). A simplistic understanding of sublimation might suggest that the chosen object acts as a *substitute object*, a stand-in for the long-lost maternal presence (the Thing),⁸² and that this idealization of the object is what satisfies the sublimated drive. This would accord with one

⁸² Lacan explains his conceptualization of the Freudian "Thing" in IV. "Das Ding" in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960* (1992, 43-70).

of Freud's accounts of sublimation as the redirection of the libido toward some culturally acceptable purpose. Rather than culminate in sexual fulfillment, the libido would thus be redirected toward an intellectual feat or an artistic creation (Freud 1972; 2010). In this version of sublimation, the libido is sublimated in order to accord with the purposes of the wider community.

Such notions of substitution and culturally appropriate redirection are notably absent in Copjec's account of sublimation. I infer that she reads Lacan's explanation of "sublimation as 'the elevation of an ordinary object to the dignity of the Thing,'" as suggesting that the object is elevated precisely to *the dignity, not, the place of the Thing*. Instead of the mistaken understanding of sublimation as "the substitution of an ordinary object for the Thing" (Copjec 2002, 37), in this vision of sublimation "one seeks satisfaction from an ordinary object instead of waiting vainly for the arrival of the Thing" (Copjec 2002, 37). In this manner, the object becomes satisfying in itself and does not simply act as substitute for an unattainable ideal object.

As the drive circles the object, the object becomes something other than itself; "it is not a means to something other than itself, but is itself other than itself" (Copjec 2002, 37). This "something more" is that which always emerges in the act of loving. Lacan calls this "the illusion of love," when "one believes the beloved is everything one could hope for without recognizing the role one's love for him or her plays in one's satisfaction" (Copjec 2002, 41). While for Lacan such an illusion at times takes on a negative valence, especially in his discussions of "courtly love," for Copjec this illusion of love is positive. This something more attests to the autonomy of the lover's position.

The elevation of the ordinary object to the place of a beloved object enacts a reversal of the typical understanding of sublimation as a means to act in accordance with the demands of the community. In Copjec's account, sublimation entails not a redirection of libido, but a sublimation of the harshness of the demands of the community, of the injunctions of the superego. Sublimation enacts a deflection of the limits imposed by collective meaning, as "the elevation of the external object of the drive...does not depend on its cultural or social value in relation to other objects" (Copjec 2002, 60). The beloved object's value "depends solely on the drive's election of it as an object of satisfaction" (Copjec 2002, 60). Beloved objects attest to "the absence of that egoistic self-consciousness which causes us to bow to external circumstances, to the wills and desires—the preferences—of others..." (Copjec 2002, 40). That is to say, in loving, one stumbles upon an unexpected object that surprises in its capacity to satisfy.

What is satisfying in the loved object remains *resistant to articulation, resistant to the logic of the Other*, as this satisfaction emerges precisely in the coincidence of the drive with its object. This satisfaction in the "something more" remains inseparable from the enmeshment of the lover and the beloved object. In this sense, "sublimation does not separate thought from sex, but rather from the supposed subject of knowledge, that is from the Other. For, the satisfaction of the drive by sublimation testifies to the autonomy of the subject, her independence from the Other..." (Copjec 2002, 45). The autonomy engendered in love derives from the fact that the lover loves in the beloved something that emerges in the drive's coincidence with the object, something that remains inexplicable in the loved object as it is understood in the community, in history, and even in language.

Somewhat counterintuitively, this notion of the lover's autonomy echoes Kant's understanding of autonomy as freedom from determination by "pathological" motives. As I discuss in chapter one, for Kant, autonomy entails remaining free from pathological inclinations, free from being motivated to seek some end goal or object based on the qualities of the object or on the reasons one has for pursuing the goal or object. Actions motivated by inclinations are dependent upon contingent and external circumstances, and are thus lacking the autonomy characteristic of truly ethical actions (Kant 1993, 19). Kant uses the term "pathological" to describe these actions, which he defines as driven by an interest in pleasure and therefore as subject to the whims of the individual. Pathological actions cannot be ethical because they are "dependent on only subjective conditions..." (Kant 1993, 19). These actions could not possibly follow a self-derived law free from the whims of particular inclinations (Kant 1993, 19). While love might at first appear to be the epitome of pathological inclinations, in that it seems to describe an inclination to pursue a *specific* object, Copjec's notion of love challenges this assumption.

Love, as an unchosen sublimation of the dictates of established meaning, actually accords with Kant's notion of autonomy as freedom from pathological motivation. The object of love is not a pathological object because the object of love is not chosen according to the expressible specifics of the object. The lover does not exactly choose the object, but comes across it in a chance encounter. The lover stumbles upon an ordinary object and, in this stumbling, forms an inexpressible attachment to the object that changes both lover and beloved. As Copjec suggests, the object of love is not a pathological object because what we love in the object is "its difference from itself," (2002, 80), that is, the excess produced by the drive and its coincidence with the object. The lover remains undetermined by a prior

inclination, as both she and the beloved object are substantially transformed through the act of love.

Copjec demonstrates her notion of love as a sublimation and alludes to the autonomy generated in love through her portrayal of the loving Antigone. Antigone remains free from social determination precisely by loving, in her brother, that which is socially impossible. Copjec states:

Whereas Hegel focuses on the merits of Antigone's act of installing Polyneices as 'a member of the community...which sought to destroy him,' Lacan views the act of the loving sister as a definitive break with her community...In other words, the deed Antigone undertakes traces the path of the criminal drive, away from the possibilities the community prescribes... (Copjec 2002, 38).

In her actions, Antigone is autonomous; she "is indifferent to external criteria, such as the good opinion of others" (Copjec 2002, 40), the edicts of the gods, or the laws of man. Rather than being determined by the object of her love, Antigone remains free from the object of her desire as defined by the language of the community.⁸³ In Kantian terms, Antigone is not motivated to act by a desire that stems from inclination. Her love does not attach to the symbolic and ego features of her brother but, rather, to the gap between his identity in terms of the community and the leftover Real of his being that language seems to conceal.

⁸³ Butler (2000) and Miriam Leonard (2006) argue that Lacan's portrayal of Antigone, as removed from the symbolic community, depoliticizes her actions. In their view, Lacan's understanding of Antigone would not be so different from Hegel's depiction of Antigone as the guardian of the family who sets out against Creon, the guardian of the polis (of sovereign language). This would be in line with the criticisms of Lacan that suggest that he exhibits the patriarchal tendency to resign women to the role of the apolitical and natural—to efface their agency as subjects. I do not wish to defend Lacan against these claims; he operates in the realm of patriarchal language, but I do not agree that his reading of Antigone resigns her to the realm of the apolitical. Rather, I show that in Lacan's reading, Antigone appears as a revolutionary political subject *par excellence*.

While Antigone is indeed indifferent and autonomous with respect to what is possible within the community, she is not apathetic or closed off from her brother; he is her beloved object. Copjec states “though her love for her brother does not depend on any of his qualities, Antigone is not indifferent to them; she accepts them all, lovingly” (Copjec 2002, 41). Antigone’s indifference is not indifference toward her brother as she sees him, but rather toward what her brother means to the community, toward how he is defined in social representation. In loving her brother with no justification other than that *he is her brother*, Antigone remains free from social determination, free from the terms she might be given to explain, to give an account of, her love.

The satisfaction afforded to the lover by the excess surrounding the beloved, an excess produced by a chance encounter between the drive and an ordinary object, precipitates the lover’s autonomous ethical stance of distance from the force of social imperatives, from the directives of the Other. Love changes both lover and beloved in a way that is inexplicable, that cannot be put into words. This is the excess that love brings, the excess that escapes the boundaries of the possible in a given social order. Love, conceived of as aligned with sublimation, affords the self the impetus to move away from established ways of being and towards a critical reevaluation of social patterns and beliefs. As I explain in the following section, because love incidentally heightens our awareness of the gap between what we can express in language and what we actually experience, it encourages a bearing that is significantly less confined within what is considered socially possible.

Alenka Zupančič: L' Entre Deux and Dissidence

Copjec's notion of love as sublimation has much in common with Zupančič's portrayal of love in "On Love as Comedy." Both theorists allude to the ways in which love alerts us to the limits of representation. In introducing something in excess of social meaning, love inspires a subversive awareness concerning the limits of the language of the Other. Love exaggerates the gap between all the reasons we could give as to why we love and the actual impetus that moves us to love. Love draws our attention to the gap in symbolic representation, to the fact that collective meaning fails and in this failing engenders our desire for something more.

Zupančič suggests that both comedy and tragedy construct and play up this gap in representation. She states that "the preservation or rather the construction of a certain *entre deux*, interval or gap, is as vital to a good comedy as it is to a good tragedy" (Zupančič 1990, 64). Yet, Zupančič notes, while tragedy locates this gap in the discordance between the appearance or representation of the Thing and the residue or void that it appears to hide, comedy forces this gap to appear elsewhere. Whereas in Lacan's reading of *Antigone*, one might read this gap as produced through the "friction that results from a relative movement of two heterogeneous things, one being determinable (or sensible) or conditional [Polyneices as he is embodied in the symbolic], the other unconditional and indeterminate [what language appears to conceal about Polyneices from Antigone's position]" (Zupančič 1990, 67), comedy locates this gap in the difference between two *appearances*.

Zupančič argues that love like comedy approaches the Real obliquely through the difference between the ideal and the ordinary. Love, she suggests, consists in perceiving the disjuncture between the mundane object and the sublime longed-for-Thing that it is meant to replace in instances of idealizing love. Both are illusions, but between these two illusions there is a “minimal difference” (Zupančič 1990, 65), a difference that alludes to something more than the sum of the two appearances. In love, it is this disjuncture between the primal and sublime lost object—as it is idealized in the beloved—and the beloved as she comes that creates the excess, the pleasure, and the joy that the presence of the beloved brings. Rather than using the beloved as a replacement for the inaccessible Thing (as the erroneous understanding of sublimation assumes), in true love, the lover perceives “the two objects (the banal and the sublime object) on the same level, and simultaneously, which means that neither one of them is occulted or substituted by the other” (Zupančič 1990, 72-73). In this sense, “...to love someone ‘for what he is’ (i.e. move directly to the Thing), always means to find oneself with a ridiculous object, an object that sweats, snores, farts and has strange habits, but it also means to see in this object ‘something more’” (Zupančič 1990, 71). “To love means to perceive this gap or discrepancy,” between the idealized version of the beloved, and how they truly come, “and to not so much be able to laugh at it, as to have an irresistible urge to laugh at it. The miracle of love is a funny miracle” (Zupančič 1990, 71). Between the two appearances, at the disjoint of our idealization of the beloved and how they actually come, we sense something real about the beloved, the very “why” of why we love them.

This perception of the disparity between the ideal and the actual accounts for how the sensation of love hints at the cracks in the system of representation. This trace of the

symbolic's failure, a trace of the lack of completeness or unity of the subject's being, appears in love and enriches the loving relationship with a humorous and pleasurable excess. As in Copjec's account of sublimation, Zupančič's notion of comedy alludes to the excessive and freeing nature of love.

Both theorists conceive of love as a manifestation of the drive, which always stumbles upon a surprising object at the most inopportune moments. An encounter with the Real, the inexpressible excess generated by the drive's collision with the object, "is not something that happens when we want it, or try to make it happen, or expect it, or are ready for it... it is always something that doesn't fit the (established or anticipated) picture" (Zupančič 1990, 74). As Zupančič explains, "the whole point of the Lacanian concept of the Real is that the impossible happens. This is what is so traumatic, disturbing, shattering—or funny—about the Real. The Real happens precisely as the impossible" (Zupančič 1990, 74). It is one's reaction to this encounter with the impossible (that happens) that determines one's potential to embrace the disruptively freeing aspects of the occurrence. In surrendering to encounters with the Real, we let this startling presence change us in unforeseen ways that test the bounds of the socially possible.

In exposing us to the startling outside, an outside we never apprehend directly, but rather appreciate in the dissonance between our beloved as idealized and as experienced, love enriches our capacity to sense the disjuncture between all of the accounts we might give of love and the actual experience of love itself. Said another way, love, as comedy, has the ability to turn our attention to that which escapes social signification and every day experience, and more importantly to that which already rebels within us. Whether we sense this discord in our limbs, as in the hysteric's bodily refusal to submit to the norms of

austere womanhood, or as an affective refusal, an anxious tremor at the thought of getting out of bed to go to a job that will never adequately provide for the sustenance of our loved ones, love alerts us to that which is in us that already resists circumscription in normative experience. Love encourages an awareness, a bodily consciousness, that things could be, or are otherwise than how we experience them within the terms we are given to account for our lives. Love heightens our capacity to question and resist the terms of the social, conditions we can now sense as not necessarily, natural, given, or intrinsic to our lives.

As a figure of tragedy, Antigone approaches the Real through the disjuncture between the symbolic and that which escapes the symbolic, between her brother as he stands in the eyes of the community and her brother as he appears in her eyes as beloved. Zupančič's understanding of the splitting that occurs in love helps clarify Antigone's position with respect to her brother. Perhaps it is the disjuncture between her brother as idealized, and her brother as he is, that Antigone loves. Indeed, Copjec comes close to Zupančič in suggesting that "the 'is' of the beloved is split, fractured. The beloved is always slightly different from or more than, herself. It is this more, this extra, that makes the beloved more than just the ordinary object of my attention" (2002, 43). In this sense, both tragedy and comedy emphasize a doubleness, a surfeit produced by love. This surprising excess pulls us into a realm where we glimpse the incongruity of social laws and they lose their effective grip on us, their ability to determine our ways of being in the world. The posture of love frees us from a complacent adherence to established social order, enabling the autonomous creation of new ways of seeing, acting, and believing.

Breaking Away

Antigone's break with social law, her slide away from the confines of the socially possible, becomes apparent as she justifies her love for her brother, not by appealing to any order of law, but, simply by invoking her brother's singularity. She claims, "if my husband had died, I could have had another, and a child by another man, if I had lost the first, but with my mother dead and father in Hades below, I could never have another brother" (11. 908-912) (Copjec 2002, 40). Copjec recounts Antigone's sentiment as she attests to her brother's irreplaceability: "There will never be another like him. His value to her depends on nothing he has done nor on any of his qualities. She refuses to justify her love for him by giving reasons for it, she calls on no authority, no deity, none of the laws of the polis to sanction the deed she undertakes on his behalf" (2002, 40). Lacan emphasizes that Antigone "affirms the unique value of his [Polyneices's] being without reference to any content, to whatever good or evil Polyneices may have done" (1992, 279). In affirming her brother's particular existence and her unspeakable love for him, Antigone refuses to justify her love to the community in terms they might comprehend and instead rebuffs the realm of law and its prescribed pursuit of the good.⁸⁴

This criminal love, as a refusal to be determined by pre-given terms and a radical affirmation of forms of otherness that resist social symbolization, drives the self toward an autonomous ethical comportment. Antigone refuses to turn away from her abject brother;

⁸⁴ Stefani Engelstein points out that Lacan and others have failed to explore the role of Ismene, Antigone's sister in the play. Honig also makes this point (Engelstein 2011). Engelstein suggests that this omission makes Antigone seem isolated, at the limit of the human, rather than as intimately connected in loving relationships. I contest that while Antigone does split with the wider social world, she does not turn away from loving relationality but, rather, affirms it in the face of that which would destroy it.

yet, she also refuses to specifically transgress a given law. Rather, her refusal to answer the questions that the law poses, that is, her refusal to justify her love in terms of legality, attests to the fact that it is truly the impossible, not the transgressive, that love engenders. Antigone is able to disregard what is deemed possible within the community—to act autonomously—precisely because she remains open to the otherness that love (as the impossible that happens) brings to the fore.

Autonomy, figured as a comportment aligned with love as an affirmation of the impossible, complicates law, the “nomos” aspect of “auto-nomy.” While the property of the “auto” or self remains in a weakened form in Copjec and Lacan’s accounts, “nomos” slides away from the connotative meaning of autonomy in this context. As I explain in the following chapter, nomos might best be defined, not as law, but as a field of meaning upon which all law draws—precisely what can be conceived of as possible within a community. Copjec suggests that Antigone is only able to break away from the confines of the socially possible by becoming socially impossible, by jeopardizing her integrity as a socially recognizable subject. Copjec explains: “If she [Antigone] is able to undertake such a fundamental break with the existing laws of her community, this is only because she has first been able to unloose herself from the fundamental law of her own being” (2002, 43). Antigone must first risk her status as a socially viable member of the human community—humanity defined in opposition to what the community finds to be inhuman or impossible—before she can truly disregard the symbolic logic of the community. One becomes loosened from one’s social-self meaning precisely through the act of loving.

Love, understood as an encounter with the impossible that happens, interrupts and transforms the subject. Copjec describes this rupture and metamorphosis as it occurs in

Antigone. She appears to mutate and take on an avian existence, attested to by the “bird-like cries that” she “emits on learning that her brother’s body has been re-exposed after the first burial” (Copjec 2002, 44). For Lacan it “is this wild tearing away from herself, this inhuman rather than heroic metamorphosis,” (Copjec 2002, 43) that illustrates the ethical nature of Antigone’s action. Here, Lacan “establishes” the link “between ethics and the ‘inhuman’ aspect of the heroine” (Zupančič 1998, 108). Copjec suggest that Lacan’s ethics expresses just this affirmation of transformation:

...the ethics of psychoanalysis is concerned not with the other, as is the case with so much contemporary work on ethics, but rather with the subject, who metamorphoses herself at the moment of encounter with the real of an unexpected event. Lacan’s ethical imperative, ‘Do not give way to your desire,’ proposes itself as anything but an insistence that one stubbornly conform to one’s person history...the ethics of psychoanalysis...is rather a matter of personal conversion (Copjec 2002, 44).

Antigone lives this “personal conversion” by becoming other than herself, by becoming that which is defined as inhuman in terms of social discourse. Antigone follows her desire to the end; she allows it to fracture her self-law, her very identity as a member of a family and a community, and even humanity.⁸⁵

It is this split with self-identity that characterizes the psychoanalytic account of freedom and reveals its distance from liberal accounts of freedom. Autonomy, described in liberal thought as the self’s ability to unrestrictedly and rationally choose from among pre-given choices remains a form of submission to social law, to the status quo of “what is.” As I show in chapter one, such choices are dependent upon the subject’s interests (and

⁸⁵ While Butler rejects Lacan’s reading of Antigone as a figure who appears to depart from the symbolic order (Butler equates the symbolic with the social), her reading of the play does express a similar understanding of Antigone as an “impossible” figure. Sarah De Sanctis presents the two views, Lacan’s and Butler’s (Lacan’s represented by Žižek) side-by-side, to argue that they both depict Antigone as a revolutionary political figure who acts to challenge and ultimately reconfigure the social order (De Sanctis 2012).

dependent upon given possibilities—Antigone desires the impossible). In this liberal version of “freedom,” the self understands and selects objects of desire, such and such goods, according to their social value. This dependence upon external circumstances fails to truly loosen the self from social dictates.

In contrast to this form of autonomy where the subject remains confined within the terms of the Other, Copjec elaborates on the special nature of Lacan’s psychoanalytic conceptualization of freedom. Copjec states that, “the subject’s only freedom consists precisely in its ability to *disregard* all circumstances, causes, conditions, all promises of reward or punishment for its actions” (Copjec 1994, 96). In this way, “the subject determines itself by not ‘choosing’ its own good (an illusory freedom, since the good determines the choice, not the other way around), but by choosing not to be motivated by self-interest and thus by acting contrary to its own good—even to the point of bringing about its own death” (Copjec 1994, 96). Rather than acting in a way determined by the pursuit of any given good, even one’s own good, autonomy requires the rejection of all aspirations for the good.

This notion of autonomy as possibly antithetical to the subject’s own good aligns with Kant’s insight that moral autonomy, far from assuring pleasure, brings about something closer to pain. Kant insists that morality “as submission to a law... constrains the sensuously affected subject, it contains, therefore no pleasure but rather displeasure proportionate to this constraint” (Kant 1993, 84). Lacan, developing his notion of ethics as unpleasant and possibly destructive to the subject directly from Kant’s insight, suggests that “moral law affirms itself in opposition to pleasure and...to speak of the real in connection with the moral law seems to put into question the value we normally include in

the notion of the ideal” (1992, 20). Autonomy cannot mean choosing from among socially recognized goods, as the subject’s “good is already pointed out to him as the significant result of a signifying composition that is called up at the unconscious level...at the level where he has no mastery over the system of directions and investments that regulate his behavior in depth” (Lacan 1992, 72). The absolute choice, the ethical choice that moves away from the possible and into the impossible is “a choice that is motivated by no good” (Lacan 1992, 240). In the current era that so prizes pleasure, happiness, life⁸⁶ and the individual, suicide, either symbolic or biological, is an action entirely dismissive of the “Good.”

I contend, however, that the indifference to the good, as expressed in a comportment of autonomy, is not a cold indifference; rather, it is a loving indifference, in that it is an indifference produced by opening to a rupture in symbolic integrity produced by an act of love. A refusal to be motivated by good originates in an openness to otherness, especially forms of otherness that tend to provoke defensive and fearful reactions in society. Consequently, this refusal risks the self’s very social existence. It is Antigone’s loving affirmation of her criminal brother that moves her to the limits of language and enables her to perform her heroic and autonomous act—the act that ultimately leads her to social and biological death.

In his discussion of the transgressive potential of sacrifice, Slavoj Žižek reveals that such an ethical act of symbolic risk belongs within the realm of the feminine. He contrasts the feminine act with the masculine act of transgression and concludes that the feminine undertaking exhibits a more radical break with the law. He argues that the masculine

⁸⁶ Here of course Foucault’s notion of biopower (1978) and Agamben’s notion of bare life (1998) come to mind.

transgression enacts a violation of “the explicit ruling ideology” (Žižek 2000a, 147), and that such a violation actually works to sustain the existing order. Without violations, the law would fall into redundancy; thus, the masculine transgression acts in support of the existing order. This transgression falls within law’s dialectic, that is, within “the tension between the All (the universal Law) and its constitutive exception” (Žižek 2000a, 147). In contrast, the feminine act entails *a total suspension of law*, an interruption of the terms of the existing order.

This kind of ethical suspension of law recalls Benjamin’s notion of divine violence, a law destroying expiatory violence that he contrasts with the mythical violence of states. Benjamin asserts, “mythical violence is bloody power over mere life for its own sake, divine violence pure power over all life for the sake of the living. The first demands sacrifice, the second accepts it” (1978, 297). While violence committed for the sake of mere life affirms and upholds law, feminine ethical violence destroys law in that it counters symbolic integrity, even at the expense of the symbolic self.

As I argue that Antigone ethically risks symbolic destruction, Žižek suggests that the ethical feminine act comes to fruition in the subject’s social self-destruction, in its destruction of that which binds it to the existing order. Žižek draws an example from Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. In the novel, the runaway slave Sethe, after having escaped slavery with her children, finds herself facing recapture under the auspices of the Fugitive Slave Law. At this point, she envisions the terrors her children will face once returned to “the cruel overseer of the plantation from which she escaped” (Žižek 2000a, 152). Faced with “this hopeless situation, without any prospect of escaping a return to slavery, Sethe resorts to a radical measure in order to spare her children a return to bondage” (Žižek 2000a, 152).

Sethe attempts to kill her children in an effort to spare them from the horrors they would face in recapture and re-enslavement. She succeeds only in killing her daughter, saving her from what she sees as a fate worse than death. Žižek describes this as Sethe's "act of trying to exterminate what is most precious to her, her progeny" (2000a, 152), in an effort to *save* what is most precious to her, the dignity and humanity of her children and her worth as a loving parent. In this "symbolic suicide," this attempted destruction of all that binds her to the social order, Sethe, paradoxically, "is claiming her role as a parent, claiming the autonomy, the freedom she needs to protect her children and give them some dignity" (Žižek 2000a, 153). There is an ethical and loving monstrosity in Sethe's act, in her rejection of human morals and her simultaneous exaltation of herself as a subject who rejects social determination in favor of irrational love.

The notion that feminine self-sacrifice epitomizes the ideal ethical act would appear, at first glance, to simply affirm woman's role as moral martyr or support an unethical normalization of murder-suicide. However, this understanding of feminine sacrifice eclipses the deeper significance of both Antigone and Sethe's acts. Neither Antigone nor Sethe risks social death for the good of another socially recognized citizen or for the good of any kind of social morality.⁸⁷ Furthermore, neither attempts to deflect responsibility for their actions. They do not court death to defend the mores of the state, family, or tradition, but rather to defend an unspeakable and precious part of their being, the singularity of their being as it is experienced only in relation to the singularity of the beings that they love. The ethical nature of feminine symbolic sacrifice derives from the ethical subject's

⁸⁷ Žižek emphasizes that self-sacrifice in accordance with Lacanian ethics is never "for the good of others...", for "the symbolic recognition" (2005, 340) of an act.

rejection of moral law and the subject's shedding of the marginal humanity once bestowed upon it. Such acts then, do not epitomize a desire for biological death; rather, they are intended to approach social death by refusing the laws of the community. This refusal also means risking biological death at the hands of society, but this is far from a drive to suicide or a search for martyrdom.

The refusal of social law is in a sense the opposite of martyrdom. Antigone does not give herself over completely to the Other or act on behalf of another living human being; she explicitly resists, risks, and persists in her autonomous desire—her desire to remain a loving being. Sethe too destroys her loving attachment to the symbolic world but does not destroy her own being's capacity for love—she defends this most violently. Both women approach freedom through proximity to death but not through suicide. In this rendering, the feminine ethical act cannot be understood as an archetypical confirmation of self-sacrificing womanhood. Rather, the ethical character of such an act comes from the insistence of the subject's desire to remain ferociously open to the risks of loving another. Such an act is one of radical self-affirmation.⁸⁸ In the fourth chapter, I will show precisely how such an ethics of love (a move that appears as self-harm, but actually exalts the self) plays out in the world of political action. I will do so by turning to the recent West Baltimore uprising as an exemplar of this ethics of loving autonomy. As in the actions of these two literary figures, I find in this situation, that an insistent willingness to partake in illicit and loving action emboldens the self, even as it endangers the self's social coherence.

⁸⁸ In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a), Luce Irigaray also complicates the traditional reading of *Antigone* as martyr, suggesting that Antigone's death represents a radical identification with the maternal not a self-sacrificing act on behalf of the fraternal.

The feminine position, love, and the criminal act exist together in a specifically anti-humanist vision of ethical autonomy. Because the position of the feminine remains nearer to the “not-all” of existence, to the imperfection of the subject, it rests much closer to the uncertain delineations of subjectivity. This fringe position allows for a greater capacity for both love and symbolic sacrifice. Love merges again here with a radical rejection of the terms of the law. The incompleteness embellished in love enriches the subject with an excess that brings the self ever closer to the abandonment of social determinants. Žižek explains, “...in love, I am also nothing but, as it were, a Nothing humbly aware of itself, a Nothing paradoxically made rich through the very awareness of its lack. Only a lacking being is capable of love...” (Žižek 2000a, 147). In this sense, “love is ‘feminine,’ it involves the paradoxes of the non-All” (Žižek 2000a, 147). The enlivening and upsetting nature of love creates the conditions for the ethical act. Žižek reminds us, this act, “the ethical act ‘as such’ has the structure of feminine subjectivity” (2000a, 154). In its marginal nature, the feminine position entails a closer proximity to a potential break with law. As I will show in my final chapter, it is from this precipice opening out into the impossible that the creation of self-law becomes possible. This reality brings us toward an understanding of autonomy not as a self-contained lawful condition, the epitome of normative masculine subjectivity, but, rather, as a disorderly condition of feminine disruption. Such an unruly and loving notion of autonomy inaugurates a different type of reflection on what it means to be self-directed.

An Ethics of Receptive Autonomy

Instead of insisting on the ethical nature of rational self-rule (a masculine-coded comportment of autonomy), I argue for the signification of the feminine position of the “not all” as the embodiment of a receptive autonomous comportment. Antigone exemplifies this idea of autonomy from the feminine position. She acts in accordance with Lacan’s ethical imperative, to never give “ground relative to one’s desire” (1992, 321). Rather than sacrificing the *near* satiation of her desire through the sublimation inherent in loving, Antigone persists in desiring and remains free from the tyranny of “the good.” Antigone is ethical because, unlike Creon who attempts to serve “the good,” the ideal form proffered by the community, Antigone rejects the pursuit of the good, follows her desire, and continues loving and morphing unto death.

In contrast to contemporary liberal theories of autonomy, my notion of a comportment of receptive autonomy affirms the risk the self faces in embracing the hazards of love and thus in rejecting the language of the community and the commands of the superego. In opposition to my account of receptive autonomy, the established notion of autonomy denies risk and is driven by fear of intrusion. The liberal vision of autonomy, as self-contained rationality, springs from the dread engendered by the proximity of invasive otherness, that which might intrude from within or without.⁸⁹ This vision of autonomy desperately denies the porousness of the self’s boundaries in an attempt to enclose the self

⁸⁹ In chapter one, I address contemporary liberal Kantian theories of autonomy (Christman 1989, Dworkin 1988, Rawls 1971). In chapter three, I show how such theories imply a disavowed fear of intrusion and otherness and how my theorization of autonomy departs from these accounts.

within a space of masterful agency.⁹⁰ Such a self, in its denial of receptivity and desire, fails to open to the conditions enabling actual autonomy. Not only does the enclosed self deny the significance of desire, it fails to grow, deprived as it is of the energetic presence of others. It seeks shelter from the presence of otherness that would allow it to respond, grow, and, if needed, resist.

Through a denial of receptivity, the enclosed self, following the command of normative social law out of fear of disruption, experiences a draining of its psychic energy. Fixated and dependent on moral law, such a self lacks the plasticity and freedom to follow its desire, achieve satisfaction, and ultimately to grow into something other than itself through love. Copjec notes the enervative effects of the law and the superego through her juxtaposing of Antigone's psychic path with Creon's. She demonstrates the devitalizing consequences of moral law and the contrasting strengthening effects of following desire by remarking on the energizing effects of Antigone's perseverance and the paralyzing effects of Creon's dependency on the law of the superego.

Creon demonstrates a fixation and dependency on the law, the ideal of the "good for all" that remains necessarily out of reach. The idea of the good stands before him as a promise of a return to fullness, an imagined time before otherness. Copjec explains, "he remains glued to an ideal he will never attain, since it is derived from his nostalgia for something he never possessed" (Copjec 2002, 46). This derailment of satisfaction characterizes the very function of the superego. The simplistic depiction of the superego as "an internalization of the laws and ideals of the community...misses the fact that the laws

⁹⁰ In chapter three, I discuss how this fear of receptivity and accompanying attempts to achieve self/other mastery result in a more profound state of general unfreedom.

and the ideals of the community are themselves fabricated only on the basis of an idealization of dissatisfaction. If the superego always demands more sacrifice, more work, this is because the ideal it sets in front of the subject is kept aloft by a loss that the subject is unable to put behind" (Copjec 2002, 46). Trapped in the masculine position's desire for fullness, Creon experiences a perpetual deferral of satisfaction. While Antigone is *driven* by the satisfaction afforded from love as sublimation, Creon remains *inhibited*, held back from satisfaction because of his "fixation on the laws of the State" (Copjec 2002, 44). These decrees, proffered by the community and internalized in the superego, demand ever more from the ego, repudiating satisfaction and weakening the ego's resolve.

These ceaseless demands attenuate the ego. The inherent "fixation on dissatisfaction" demanded by the superego "exposes the ego to the vicissitudes of public opinion" (Copjec 2002, 45-6). Creon's "failure of nerve toward the end of the play, his bending to public opinion" (Copjec 2002, 45) illustrates the weakening effect of the superego's law on the ego. This fixation not only attenuates Creon's resolve, it "causes him to be relatively indifferent to all others available to him" (Copjec 2002, 45). As Lacan notes, ironically, seeking the good of all, without fail, results in catastrophe. The good of all is unattainable, "for if one has to do things for the good, in practice one is always faced with the question: for the good of whom?" (Lacan 1992, 319).⁹¹ Creon's cold and unreceptive indifference and the accompanying enervation of his very being result from his striving toward an unattainable ideal—the attainment of the good for all—as demanded by the

⁹¹ Lacan notes that Monsieur Verdoux, of the Charlie Chaplin film of the same name, *acts for the good* of his family by murdering wealthy women to provide for his loved ones. In terms of traditional morality, which advocate our submission to a certain vision of the "good," might his actions qualify as moral? Lacan states that in acting *for the good of something*, Verdoux fails to act in accordance with Kantian morality (not liberal Kantian morality), which demands a rejection of all "goods" (1966, 658).

superego. In contrast, Antigone's loving indifference, an indifference to law brought about through an act of love, constitutes her autonomy.

Žižek succinctly clarifies the antithetical effects of submission to the superego versus those of opening to love. While striving for the ideals proffered by the superego drains the self of energy, love as an opening to relationality ethically strengthens the self. The paradox of the superego: "the more you obey the superego command, the guiltier you are," (Žižek 2000a, 23-4) contrasts directly with the paradox of love. Whereas the superego consists in a feedback loop of wearing away, the state of love submits the self to a cycle of energetic growth through a creation of pleasurable excess.⁹² In the paradox of love, "as Juliet put it in her immortal words to Romeo, 'the more I give, the more I have'" (Žižek 2000a, 24). The stark contrast between Creon's pathological dependence and Antigone's loving autonomy reveals how the law, as manifest in the superego, reigns over and debilitates the self, preventing the capacity for autonomous ethical action.

A receptive autonomous comportment, a turning away from a fiction of masterful agency, entails an affirmation of the risks involved in relationality. The dangers that the self must openly face to obtain a position of receptive autonomy include facing the possibility of social unintelligibility as well as the possibility of becoming too porous, too receptive, and thus of giving over the entirety of the self to the beloved. This giving over would mean failing to keep the space of disjuncture between the ideal object (of one's desire) and the beloved (the object of the drive) open to perception. Only the self's persistence in revealing the cracks in the symbolic—the places where words fail, where communication falters, and

⁹² In chapter three, I discuss, in more detail, the energizing effects of love. Chapter four further discuss the importance of pleasure for the achievement of an autonomous comportment.

where inhuman beings emerge to challenge the terms that define humanity—keeps this vital fissure open.^{93, 94, 95} As Barad claims, “it may well be the inhuman, the insensible, the irrational, the unfathomable, and the incalculable that will help us face the depths of what responsibility entails” (2012b, 218). Perhaps this attentiveness to the inexplicable requires vigilant receptivity toward the uncertainties and vulnerabilities that come from a life lived in relationality.

Rather than forever striving for symbolic mastery over the terms of existence, established as they are by the order of the Other, the receptively autonomous self would risk uncertainty and acknowledge the unattainability of total coherence. Such an affirmation of linguistic insecurity and fundamental proximity to otherness would serve to thwart the temptation to establish a masterful certainty over the terms of being. The lessening of this drive to control would encourage a more open stance toward relationality, but, not at the expense of the self’s capacity for resisting and reformulating the terms of the social.

A compulsion for mastery as manifest in the image of the self as rational and non-dependent works against the self’s capacity for critique and growth as well as against the

⁹³ This is in no sense a pre-discursive ahistorical otherness, but rather that which resists representation in a particular discursive context. Foucault importantly points out that this very questioning of the representable, the hallmark of the modern era that is epitomized by Kant’s critiques, actually instantiates a new field of intelligibility, “one whose purpose will be to question, apart from representation, all that is the source and origin of representation” (1994, 242). Lacanian psychoanalysis, feminist theory, and all manner of critical theory concerned with the constitution of subjectivity surely belong to this new field of intelligibility.

⁹⁴ Nancy Luxon notes that psychoanalysis has always been attentive to the “remainder that resists meaning-making” (2003, 112). Psychoanalysis remains uniquely aware that “self-transformation would seem to require an ability to grapple with this surfeit that escapes beyond earlier efforts at organization and classification” (2003, 113).

⁹⁵ Eisenstein and McGowan also suggest that psychoanalysis is uniquely aware of this inhumanness—produced by existence in language—that marks humanity’s rupture with animality. They claim: “While other animals are just animals and live out their instincts rather than relating to them, the human animal fails to coincide with itself; it is inhuman. The human animal is the political animal because of the interruption in its biology; psychoanalysis is the first theory to recognize this interruption that derives from the subject’s entrance into the realm of the signifier” (2012, 193).

possibility of a less violent social existence.⁹⁶ The striving for a sovereign self of secure enclosure—as in Creon’s futile attempts to achieve self-determination—entails a deflection of insecurity onto others. I can be sovereign only if others cannot touch me, only if I am assured I will always be safe from the violence experienced by others. Yet, when I turn away from the touch of the other, I forget how to touch. I forget how to affect the other gently and be affected in turn. My only recourse to maintain the boundaries of my being is to expel otherness violently.⁹⁷ Such a dynamic is epitomized in Creon’s impenetrability and fixation on moral law. The tragedy of *Antigone* portrays how this turning away from receptivity feeds upon itself and heightens social paranoia, deadening the self’s capacity to take a critical stance toward stifling and harmful social mores. Without the capacity to resist and turn against the normative, the self is left to follow heedlessly the commands of social custom. I contend that this uncritical and unreceptive state is the antithesis of actual autonomy.

Attentive to this dynamic, Lee Edelman notes the connection between illusions of self-sovereignty and a lack of critical capacity. He argues that resistance to undoing, nonsovereignty, and negativity in the face of otherness entails a parallel drive for mastery, for coherence and social harmony (Berlant and Edelman 2013, 18). Thus, whereas a Creon-like figure would strive for communal coherence and unanimity, forever seeking one vision of the good, a receptively capacious self would affirm the negative in relationality,

⁹⁶ Kelly Oliver argues that Kristeva suggests that openness to loss and to the otherness of language forestalls compulsions to commit violence (Oliver 2013).

⁹⁷ In much of his work, Leo Bersani makes a similar point about the violent tendencies that accompany the striving for masterful selfhood (Bersani 1990; 1986; 2010).

remaining open to the touch of otherness that upsets laws of the self, of the social, and of the divine.

Edelman, ironically named the “anti-relational” queer theorist par excellence, elaborates a political ethic depicting the worthiness of critique *and* relationality, suggesting that the political question is not how might we maintain a coherent political community, but, rather, how might we remain open to and less resentful of disruptions that foil our attempts to secure self-coherence and communal harmony. (Berlant and Edelman 2013, 70-71). These divisions, endemic to our lives as social beings, form the shifting and unsettling basis for politics itself. An ethical approach to encounters that alert us to our non-sovereign nature would require a willingness to face negativity and uncertainty and forgo fantasies of political unity and harmony. Edelman asks us to consider politics, not as a practice for reaching consensus but, rather, as a practice of dealing with otherness and incoherence “in ways that don’t just shore up the ego for our survival or self defense...” (2013, 69). He asks: “Is politics the fantasy, when you break it down, of breaking down figures of fantasy?” (Berlant and Edelman 2013, 71). An ethics of breaking down fantasies of self-sovereignty and harmony through an openness to disruption, as I will show, paradoxically entails a growth in self-assuredness and creative agency.

A particular willingness to love allows for a disruption of the self’s adherence to social identity, enabling a creative and autonomous revision of the terms of the self’s social existence. Attending to the recent Baltimore uprising in the fourth chapter, I will delve into exactly how disturbances that challenge the imaginary wholeness and coherence of both the self and the social serves to strengthen the critical and creative capacities of political subjects. Political actors like those involved in the uprising in West Baltimore show how

disruptions of self-sovereign fantasies enable a capacity for autonomy in the dispossessed and might compel a reconsideration of illusions of mastery belonging to those complicit in their dispossession.

The question that remains then, is what type of self is capable of assuming a posture of receptive autonomy? The self, far from being divinely crafted and predisposed for abstract and rational conduct, is grown from and cultivated in an enmeshment of bodies, affects, and energies. The environment in which the self emerges generates its ever-changing particularities and aptitudes, its capacities and tendencies. The self inclined to an ethos of receptive autonomy emerges in a loving, responsive, and at times unsatisfying environment. As I will show in the following chapter, the receptive yet capacious self requires sustenance, energetic attention, and confrontation to grow bold. Such a self remains truly autonomous as it depends only upon something that it partially creates, the wider sociality of which it is a part.⁹⁸ This dependency, while not heteronomous, necessitates a risk, a trust in the other. Loving is falling, and there is always a chance that the fall never draws a response from the beloved. Consequently, the character of the atmosphere in which the fall takes place remains crucial to the lover's readiness to fall once more.

Receptive autonomy rejects the established terms said to define the traditionally autonomous subject. In contrast to a humanist morality of rational self-determination, this

⁹⁸ Here, I allude to Hegel's critique of Kantian autonomy (Hegel 1977). As I touch on briefly in chapter four, for Hegel, true freedom entails participation in the conditions that enable human freedom, that is participation in the ethical community and eventually the state, rather than merely the ability to choose from among a number of potentially moral or potentially evil subjective inclinations. Freedom in Hegel's work and, I would argue, in psychoanalytic theory does not consist in the ability to prefer, but rather in the ability to create, change, and morph the conditions of the social and thus the conditions of the self.

account of autonomy tends toward the inhumanness of Lacanian ethics.⁹⁹ Taking up Lacan's challenge to think otherwise about the ethical, this elaboration of receptive autonomy challenges and refigures fundamental beliefs about freedom, ethics, and morality. Receptive autonomy diverges from a theory of freedom as liberation of the libido, or as Lacan calls it "the naturalist liberation of desire," (1992, 5) and instead stands on the unsteady ground of symbolic failure. It is the continued failure of the subject's attempts to signify experience that sustains desire and thus enables freedom.

The incongruity between a vision of rational selfhood and the reality of the self's existence in a complicated milieu irreducible to social signification opens a gap, a place occupied by what is inhuman. The border-dwellers, the "others," and the feminine live in close proximity to this incongruous space. More aware of the ridiculousness of self-sovereignty—the comedic nature of imagined fullness—perhaps they possess more of a capacity for the radical rejection of the social laws they intuit as impossibilities. While the marginal might sense the presence of this incongruity between being and the impractical demand for self-sovereignty more profoundly, all beings of desire possess the ability to approach this gap between social subjugation and embodied existence. The presence of this gap, pried ever more open through an ethics of loving autonomy, serves to both unsettle and empower the self with critical capacity. In hazarding the potential exposure of this inhumanity, the inarticulate leftovers of subjectivity, a loving posture—a posture that

⁹⁹ Žižek ties Kant's understanding of freedom to the inhuman by means of a Lacanian reading of Kantian freedom. Žižek suggests that Kant's notion of the "gap between phenomenal and noumenal" (Žižek 2006, 25) constitutes the third term between the human perspective and the divine perspective. This gap, which is home to the inhuman, is the "place of freedom."

affirms the vulnerability inherent in relationality—unravels the binds of moral law,
enabling the creation of politics anew.

Chapter Three: The Nourished Self

But what are our selves? Everything, good or bad, that we have gone through from our earliest days onwards: all that we have felt in our inner world, happy and unhappy experiences, relationships to people, activities, interests, and thoughts of all kinds—that is to say, everything we have lived through—makes part of ourselves and goes to build up our personalities. If some of our past relationships, with all the associated memories, with the wealth of feelings they called forth, could be suddenly wiped out of our lives, how impoverished and empty we should feel! How much love, trust, gratification, comfort and gratitude, which we experienced and returned would be lost! Many of us would not even want to have missed some of our painful experiences, for they have also contributed to the enrichment of our personalities.

—Melanie Klein, 1936

The practice of psychoanalysis, developed by Freud during the height of Victorian-era liberalism, both upholds and challenges a foundational assumption of liberal theory—the belief in the individual as the natural and ideal expression of selfhood. Psychoanalysis undermines liberalism's faith in the pre-given atomistic self by suggesting that individuals are not born but made. In attending to the relations that comprise and shape the self, psychoanalysis presses against liberal beliefs about the naturalness of the individuated subject. Rather than envisioning selfhood as of only one nature, psychoanalysis, in its various forms, looks to the social and cultural conditions that foster or discourage the emergence and endurance of particular types of selves. Because psychoanalysis examines the context in which the self develops or fails to develop, according to our normative beliefs, it provides insight into how we might rethink the feasibility and desirability of these beliefs, beliefs that often assert the positive value of autonomy understood as non-dependence.

While I emphasize the political worth of a notion of autonomy, a concept very often linked to individualism and self-determination, I continue, in this chapter, to reevaluate how we understand autonomy by enriching my account of receptive autonomy—a comportment of autonomy enabled by an affirmative approach to relationality. In what follows, I turn to Freudian psychoanalysis to show how liberal principles that assume and idealize self-sovereignty normalize a resistant and defensive psychic structure that creates a social environment that actually discourages a receptive autonomous comportment.

I propose that the commonplace liberal understanding of autonomy, as a faculty of rational, non-dependent, and self-standing subjects, originates from a fear of otherness and vulnerability, and that this liberal ideal of autonomy actually results in a society-wide denial of dependence that prevents receptive autonomy. Feminist Freudians Jessica Benjamin and Elizabeth Young-Bruehl attest to this negative assessment of liberal autonomy, as they contend that receptiveness to dependency enables the taking-in of nourishment and thus allows for conditions of growth, reciprocal care, and vitalization—the conditions I describe as productive of autonomous capacity. While relationality entails risk and even the potential for violence at the hands of others, avoidance of intertwinement robs the self of growth-potential, as this avoidance means turning away from otherness, from the currents of love and loss that foster powers of self-direction.

Receptive autonomy requires a willingness to engage with otherness, to respond to difference, loss, and uncertainty, to all that we cannot explain about our world, in a non-defensive manner. Only in opening to the presence of our world, to what legal scholar Robert Cover calls our “nomos,” our “normative universe” (1983, 4), do we truly gain the capacity to resist, rework, and rewrite the laws that comprise our nomos. Our nomos

encompasses much more than the laws enforced by state institutions. As Cover suggests, such state laws stand or fall in relation to the social narratives that either buttress or destroy their force and authority (1983, 11). Accordingly, “the creation of legal meaning—‘jurisgenesis’—takes place always through an essentially cultural medium” (Cover 1983, 11). In this sense, receptive “auto” “nomy” (derived from auto-self/nomos-law) denotes a receptive approach to the world that allows the self, the “auto,” to create its own “nomos,” its own laws—the narratives and meanings that constitute its world.

This normative world comes into being through enculturated responses to otherness. Cover explains, “just as the development of increasingly complex responses to the physical attributes of our world begins with birth itself, so does the parallel development of the responses to personal otherness that define the normative world” (1983, 5). The very manner in which one learns to approach otherness, to approach the world, determines the very qualities and meanings that this world holds. Consequently, the ways in which we learn to engage with the world directly relate to our ability to create our nomos, to write our social-self laws, to express an autonomous comportment.

In the following, I look to how specific psychic-social patterns shape the manner in which we approach the uncertainty and dependence that relationality entails. I continue to show that the ability to respond non-defensively and non-violently to vulnerability enables autonomous capacity, while resistance to dependence weakens capacities for creative action and thought. Psychoanalysis reveals the self-contradictory nature of autonomy as self-determination—how resistance to human interdependence actually dampens the possibility of critical awareness and creativity, the very capacities I associate with receptive autonomy.

In this sense, I depart from feminist thinkers who reject the idea of autonomy tout court for its ties to a liberal conception of subjectivity as self-determined. Instead, I continue to develop my claim that autonomy retains political value as a mode of social critique—the capacity to think and move against the current of social norms—and creativity—the capacity to think and move beyond the bounds of the possible.

While the previous chapter portrayed the autonomous capacities engendered by a receptive and loving self willing to risk its social cohesion, this chapter turns to the conditions that foster such a posture of openness and self-direction. Not denying the critical worth of the foregoing chapter's insistence on the autonomy-enabling potential in erotic self-disruption, this chapter emphasizes the important role of nourishment in determining the self's potential to embody a comportment of receptive autonomy. I also discuss the impediments to the growth of selves capable of a loving and autonomous mode of being.

I first provide an overview of liberal autonomy and its social implications. I start by illustrating how the predominate understanding of autonomy, presented in liberal theory and idealized in American society, normalizes independence (and those posed to act in a self-determined manner) and devalues dependence (and those associated with dependency). I then trace the social and psychic costs of this normative ideal of autonomy.

Against this liberal notion of autonomy, I turn to suggest that receptive autonomy relies upon an open stance toward relationality and dependency—precisely those conditions mostly devalued in liberal society. Elizabeth Young-Bruehl offers an account of the self as composed of otherness. Her vision of the self as a being comprised of relations

supports my contention that the self's autonomous capacity requires an affirmation of relationality.

Next, I look to philosopher Jonathon Lear's reading of Freud's vision of love to qualify that the self, and thus the self capable of autonomous comportment, must face negativity, as the self is formed in a frictive yet loving relationship with loss and otherness. Dissonance enables but might also disable the self. This negative aspect of selfhood accounts for the trepidation with which the self tends to approach autonomous capacity, especially in societies that disavow the loss at the heart of selfhood—the fragility of social being. Young-Bruehl and Marxist Freudian Erich Fromm form an unlikely pair in the discussion that follows. Together they describe our tendency to fear freedom; yet, only Young-Bruehl delves into why this might be so. She and psychoanalyst Takeo Doi suggest that fearful reactions to dependence are neither intrinsic, nor fundamental, but rather are the result of social practices and cultural values. This insight supports my consideration of the qualities and consequences of liberal American beliefs, which, I argue invoke just such a fearful response to interdependence.

In resisting the very basis of selfhood—the very 'otherness' of the self, liberalism engenders an environment inimical to the development of peoples' actual capacity for autonomy. Liberalism, in practice, creates a heightened sense of insecurity, as it materially denies the universality of dependency by turning over social support services to the free market, an economic system that appears justifiable only under the assumption that people exist as independent entities who deserve to stand or fall according to the merit of their individual efforts. When such a system fails to meet the needs of those who are not already posed to benefit from it, it is these losers of this system, not the system itself, who receive

the blame. They have not lived up to the ideal of independence proffered by liberal society. Liberal culture encourages an atmosphere of competition and fear. The anxiety brought about by a lack of public substructure causes people to resist further challenges to their sense of psychic integrity. They are more likely to repel the otherness that inspires creative thought and action and more likely to search for safe-harbor in accustomed ways of being.

I explore, in depth, how liberalism inspires a number of such social psychic defenses. Some of these defenses rely on a gendered distribution of vulnerability—the projection of dependency onto a feminized other. Jessica Benjamin and Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel explain how this deflection of vulnerability occurs through gender socialization. This flight from dependence leads to a deficit in both masculine and feminine subjects' abilities to express autonomy. The result of the disavowal and projection of vulnerability attests to the less than ideal outcome of socialized psychic defenses. While such defenses are meant to protect the self's ability to exist as an independent entity, they actually weaken the self and dampen its capacity for autonomy.

Defenses cause the self to turn away from nourishment, from otherness, and succumb to the false security of living according to a ready-made belief system. This belief structure might be provided in dominate social norms or in the ideals of popular political parties and leaders. In this way, while liberalism purports to sincerely value autonomy, it lays the groundwork for a society quite incapacitated in its ability for self-directed thought and action. Lastly, taking the gendered and affective facets of liberal autonomy into account, I turn to recommend a reevaluation of the assumed antithesis between autonomy and dependency.

Autonomy as Freedom *from* Others

Liberal theory tends to conceive of autonomy primarily as a state of *freedom from others and otherness* and only secondarily as a faculty of rational self-rule. Whether such otherness is portrayed as interior, as in the influence of the passions or unconscious thoughts, or as exterior, as in interference from the actions, decrees, or mores of others, liberalism establishes its doctrine of liberation as liberation *from*. Arguably, liberalism's foremost concern is the creation of a society in which one can readily protect oneself from intrusion by otherness in all its forms. This requires that liberalism presuppose the analytic and empirical possibility of differentiating individuals from others, from their relationships with others, and from the psychic life of such entwinements within the self.

Liberalism, as an ideology promoting the importance of negative liberty,^{100, 101} envisions humans as discreet units, who, although interconnected, retain the ability to stand apart from the tides of social custom and thus resist collective determination. Liberalism values the individual's ability to exist at a remove from the influence of others and aims to preserve, for the individual, a domain free from otherness. George Kateb describes liberalism's commitment to the preservation of individual rights as an obligation to remain wary of the reach and influence of state power and of "politics" and communal conventions in general (1992, 25). Accordingly, Kateb describes autonomy as wary self-

¹⁰⁰ Isaiah Berlin's *Four Essays on Liberty* (1992) is the text most readily associated with this concept of negative freedom. Berlin defines negative freedom as freedom from interference and differentiates it from positive freedom as freedom to express one's own will. In liberal accounts of autonomy, both concepts usually come into play, but negative liberty is typically understood as the apriori ground for the expression of positive freedom.

¹⁰¹ Thomas L. Dumm turns to Foucault to conceptualize freedom in an effort to counter the prevalent conception of freedom as requiring a zone free from politics, an enclosure protected from incursion by others (1996, 4-5).

direction, as “acting on one’s own, making one’s life one’s own, freely making commitments, accepting conventions known to be conventions, and straining to construct the architecture of one’s soul” (1992, 39). Kateb voices liberalism’s general contention that “autonomy consists in significant differentiation achieved through some distance between one and the world, and between one and oneself” (1992, 40). Liberalism expounds a discourse of individual detachment and distance from others and from communal conventions while not necessarily discounting the role human relations play in the lives of individuals.

Other liberal theorists express an explicit commitment to privileging individual freedom over collective expediencies. Martha Nussbaum states, “liberalism holds that the flourishing of human beings taken one by one is both analytically and normatively prior to the flourishing of the state or nation or the religious group...” (1997, 11). Similarly, Alan Wolfe, in his extensive defense of liberalism, *The Future of Liberalism* (2009), describes liberalism as a system of beliefs and a manner of governing that expresses a deep commitment to individual autonomy and thus a strong distrust of dependency. He states:

Dependency, for liberals, cripples. Human beings have minds, bodies, and both, liberals believe, should be free to exercise their full capacities: minds, through open societies that allow everyone to develop their intellect, and bodies, through societies that guarantee sufficient economic security to individuals so that they are not dependent on the arbitrary will of others... (Wolfe 2009, 10).

In his open critique of dependency, Alan affirms what other liberal theorists tend to express only indirectly, that at the heart of liberalism lies a distrust of the vulnerability occasioned by interpersonal dependence. This underlying wariness sustains the now conventional belief that individual autonomy exists in opposition to dependence and

receptivity. This presentation of autonomy as incompatible with a state of dependence has become so commonplace that few would question its validity.

Liberalism tends to define autonomy as the capacity to choose one's values, free from the undue influence of others, by means of a process of rational self-reflection. Liberal theories start with an image of the self as analytically and ideally detached from the social and propagate ideals such as individualism and non-dependence. Feminist critics of liberalism assert that in idealizing a self-standing and enclosed subject, free from dependence on, and interference from, others as well as from interior otherness—from the influence of emotions and desire—, liberalism works to denigrate the feminized conditions of dependence and emotionality.

I contend that liberal theory's concern for self-sovereignty, a state of freedom *from* the other, conveys a deep-seated fear of otherness. The ideal liberal agent must protect himself from incursions on all sides.¹⁰² Both political theorist Judith Shklar and feminist philosopher Alison Jaggar assert that the central tenets of liberalism imply fear and a concern for protection against intrusion. Jaggar states "liberals have inferred that the good society should allow each individual the maximum freedom from interference by others. Unfortunately, however, liberals believe, interference from others and even attack from others is a permanent probability in the human condition" (1983, 33). Shklar, from a position more amicable to liberalism, also conveys liberalism's basis in apprehension. Liberal societies aim to lesson this apprehension through the protection of individual rights. Shklar asserts that liberalism exists "to restrain potential abusers of power in order

¹⁰² Gerald F. Gaus states that liberalism is based on one fundamental principle: "that all interferences with action stand in need of justification" (2005, 272).

to lift the burden of fear and favor from the shoulders of adult women and men, who can then conduct their lives in accordance with their own beliefs and preferences, as long as they do not prevent others from doing so as well” (1989, 31). With the expressed aim of establishing for individuals a personal domain free from the undue influence of others, liberalism inspires a cautious approach to that which might disrupt the integrity of the self-determined subject.

This aspirational freedom from others manifests in liberal ideology as a distrust and aversion to dependence. Dependence would imply attachment; one would be at the mercy of, and beholden to, another. Accordingly, dependence retains a negative signification in liberal societies. As much feminist work contests, liberalism cherishes autonomy, understood as self-sovereignty, at the expense of valuing, or even recognizing, human interdependence. Liberal societies’ distaste for dependence materializes as a societal disregard for those deemed “dependent,” those unable to feign a rags to riches progression to full autonomy without manifest social support (Fineman 2004; Fraser and Gordon 1994; Toronto 1993; Young 1990).

A liberal idealization of independence and distrust of dependency reflects and informs the prevailing understanding of selfhood in contemporary American society. Political theorist Stephen K. White describes this conceptual bearing as “the world of disconnected, individual selves imagined by dominant modern ontology” (2000, 22). Americans assume this is “how we are” and the seeming naturalness of the self-determined individual means that all who express dependency or vulnerability appear deviant. Psychotherapist and historian Philip Cushman explains how this normative liberal picture of the self lives on through a continual iteration of modes of being that aim to express such

an ideal of individualism. He states, “when we act masterful and bounded...when we experience ourselves as self-contained, autonomous, expressive, assertive, and powerful, when we desire certain commodities, activities, or individuals that have been culturally proscribed, we experience an emotional affirmation of our way of being—we *embody* the anticipated approval of our culture” (Cushman 1995, 298). As I will show, this liberal mode of thinking about the self and its relations and the manner in which this way of thinking manifests in our very ways of being leads to a number of social-psychic defense mechanisms. Such psychic defenses thwart the self’s ability to embody a comportment of receptive autonomy. Liberal societies normalize the avoidance of deep engagement with others and otherness (that which doesn’t readily submit to established ways of understanding) to evade the attendant risks these interrelations bring. However, as I continue to argue, it is receptivity to these relational contingencies that enables autonomous comportment.

The Affectionate Current

While liberal accounts of autonomy provide very few reasons as to how or even why one might become autonomous, often simply assuming the existence of rational subjects predisposed to autonomy,¹⁰³ psychoanalysis concerns itself with precisely these issues of manner and motive. Elizabeth Young-Bruehl’s notion of the “affectionate current” helps to

¹⁰³ Kathryn Abrams notes that liberal theories of autonomy often assume the subject’s pre-given faculty for autonomy (Abrams 1999).

explain why autonomous capacity requires a receptive posture toward otherness and how social conditions and attitudes can encourage or discourage such openness.

Young-Bruehl contends that the ego, which she defines as the seat of human agency, far from being a self-sovereign homogeneous entity, consists of currents of affection produced in relationships with others. She develops her notion of the receptive ego by drawing on Freud's early theory of ego instincts. Young-Bruehl returns to Freud's pre-1920 distinction between the ego instincts and libidinal instincts to explore the implications of assuming the existence of an affectionate current not reducible to aim-inhibited libidinal instincts.

Before Freud posited the existence of the Death Instinct and united the ego and the libidinal instincts under the notion of Eros (the Life Instinct), he had theorized that "it was the self-preservative instinct, or the ego instinct" "that contrasted to the sexual instinct with its species preservative or reproductive goal" (Young-Bruehl 2003, 27). In this original dual theory of the instincts, Freud maintained that the self-preservative ego instincts were united under the "affectionate current" and that this current was directed toward the infant's caregivers. This ego instinctual drive existed to insure the self's survival, its necessary attachment to caregivers during a time of infantile helplessness. In Freud's original instinct theory, "there was an instinct underlying affection" and a more or less separate "instinct underlying sensual or sexual love" (Young-Bruehl 2003, 27). Libidinal (sexual) instincts were secondary and were *supported* by this original self-preservative affectionate current. This notion of support would become central to Freud's transition from his first theory of the instincts to his second. Freud found that "sexual instincts find their first objects by attaching themselves to the evaluations made by the ego

instincts, precisely in the way in which the first sexual satisfactions are experienced in attachment to bodily functions necessary for the preservation of life” (Young-Bruehl 2003, 27). Foreshadowing the dissolution of this division between affection and erotic love, Freud took note of the fact that the affectionate current served, from the beginning, to guide the erotic libidinal current, the two often mixing and coalescing on a beloved family member (Freud 1922).

As Young-Bruehl laments, Freud eventually leaves behind the idea of an affectionate current and posits a new dual theory of the instincts as the struggle between the Life and the Death instincts. Tracing this change in his thought, Freud proposed that the decisive step forward was his discovery of narcissism, “the discovery that the ego itself is cathected with libido, that the ego, indeed, is the libido’s original home” (Freud 2010, 105). In his finding of the libidinal nature of ego-instincts, the fact that libido was initially directed inward, rather than in an outward direction, Freud’s previous assumption of a division between the affectionate current and the always outwardly directed libidinal current had to be revised. The love of the self, its longing for survival, could no longer be figured as solely ego-instinctual. Hence, Freud arrived at the conclusion that the drive that strives for the preservation of the self and the drive that strives for the preservation of the species must be of one nature. He called this new instinctual concept Eros.

However, unwilling to accept the conclusion that all instincts must be of the same kind, Freud would come to pose a negative complement to Eros. Freud claimed “besides the instinct to preserve living substance and to join it into ever larger units, there must exist another contrary instinct seeking to dissolve those units and bring them back to their primeval, inorganic state” (2010, 106).” Freud concluded that in addition to Eros, there

must be an instinct of death opposed to the erotic forces of unification and growth. In the construction of this new theory, Freud would set the stage for a prolonged theoretical neglect of the affectionate current and a heightened philosophical interest in the battling forces of Life and Death.

In presenting this second manifestation of instinct theory, Freud strove to neatly do away with the notion of a separate current of affection. Accordingly, he described affection “not as an originary ego instinctual current but only as a result—rarely attained—of aim-inhibited sexuality” (Young-Bruehl 2003, 28). Young-Bruehl claims that in making this move from ego instinctual love to aim-inhibited libidinal love, Freud loses a socially important thread present in his original theory. This move eclipses the significant distinction to be made between libidinal instincts, that are primarily narcissistic, and ego instincts, that are *primarily relational* (Young-Bruehl and Faith Bethelard 2000, 57).

The great insight of Freud’s original theory of the instincts was his affirmation of *the primary relationality of the ego*, the notion that the self exists and survives through nourishing affection. In turning away from this conclusion, Freud leaves behind his innovative philosophical notion of relational-selfhood for an understanding of the self as comprised of possessive tendencies (desiring the other or the self as an object) and destructive tendencies (desiring to destroy the other or the self).

Freud’s turn to define affection as aim-inhibited sexuality also serves to establish his notorious theory concerning the inherent antagonism between the individual and civilization. Freud argues that for aim-inhibited sexual affection to exist, which it must in order for friendships and social bonds to occur, civilization must impose restrictions and taboos upon sexual love. Social bonding through aim-inhibited libido is thus, only possible

in a civilization that demands the repression and redirection of the sexual instincts (Freud 2010). Young-Bruehl finds that Freud's rather myopic focus on sexual instincts in *Civilization and its Discontents* obscures the potentially reparative relationship between sociality and the ego instincts. She suggests that had Freud maintained the trajectory established by his early theory of the instincts, he may have concluded "that the ego instincts might not be antagonistic to civilization as the sexual instincts are" (Young-Bruehl 2003, 27). In effect, Young-Bruehl claims that Freud's move away from love as an ego instinct and toward love as a libidinal instinct disavows the complimentary coexistence between a resilient ego and sociality.

It is precisely this coexistence of a strong self and an openness to relationality that characterizes my notion of receptive autonomy. Neither resistant to sociality, nor utterly acquiescent to societal customs, the self with a capacity for receptive autonomy affirms receptivity to otherness, while also possessing the strength to critically reject social customs found to be detrimental or unjust. As I will convey, the receptive autonomous position requires an openness to the risks of sociality, because it is in such experiences of peril that the self first realizes its existence as an entity and thus its capacity to create, resist, and receive the world.

Young-Bruehl further explains how the self thrives only in a receptive relationship with otherness. She develops her understanding of the affectionate current and of the primary receptive ego by turning to Freud's early theories, which I discuss above, and to psychologist Takeo Doi's notion of "amae," "to wish or expect to be loved" (Young-Bruehl 2000, 4-5). Young-Bruehl translates amae roughly as "cherishment." Doi suggests that the infant "begins in a condition of relatedness that is predominantly ego instinctual, not

predominantly aggressive or libidinal” (Young-Bruehl 2003, 32). From the first moments of life, the infant, in its quest to survive, desires and requires cherishment, and if adequate caregivers are present, they respond by nourishing and cherishing the infant. This primary symbiosis persists throughout life. As Young-Bruehl states: “The growth principle of the ego” ensures that “the ego aims at growth and is met by cherishment or cherishment’s lack...the ego is tropic—it is turned to what nourishes it” (2003, 32-33). The ego instincts, which work for the survival and growth of the self, are themselves a relation between cherishing and being cherished.

Young-Bruehl expands upon this connection between relationality and self-growth to present a picture of the ego as an *entity of otherness*. She states, “the fundamental aim of the ego instincts is ‘growing’ or ‘developing,’ which not only requires relatedness rather than aloneness, but *is* relatedness” (2003, 6).¹⁰⁴ The ego is not simply nourished by affection; it *is* a reciprocal current of cherishing love. The ego instincts, deployed to insure the preservation of the self, convey that the self is always imbued by otherness. Young-Bruehl states, “self preservation is a relational concept and an aim not satisfiable in isolation” (Young-Bruehl 2003, 33). In other words, the ego, as the agential aspect of selfhood in Young-Bruehl’s account, thrives only in nurturing relations with others.

In her focus on the relational nature of the receptive ego, Young-Bruehl deviates from other ego-centered psychoanalysts, like Heinz Hartman, who focus on ego-autonomy and suggest that this type of autonomy requires achieving a developmental state where the ego is free from the influence of the instincts and the instabilities they bring (Here, the ego

¹⁰⁴ This argument is similar to Judith Butler’s ontology of the “primacy of relationality” as presented in Samuel Chambers and Terrell Carver’s *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics* (2008). However, I take from Young-Bruehl’s notion of relatedness more of a sense of mutual nurturance and withholding rather than a Butlerian sense of “undoneness.”

achieves autonomy in its freedom from otherness) (Hartmann 1964). In contrast to this understanding of ego development, Young-Bruehl sees the ego as an entity of relations and the emotions they imply. Thus, she contends that the ego thrives only through an engagement with relational vicissitudes. As I will explain, in her recognition of the ego's otherness, Young-Bruehl's work avoids what Lacan criticizes as adaptive ego-focused analysis. While Young-Bruehl's ego-centered vision of the self does differ from Lacan's understanding of the ego as an illusory misrecognition of the self as sovereign (as a socially adaptive element of the subject) (Lacan 1966, 80), her notion of the ego does not disavow the ego's internal "otherness," but rather emphasizes this "otherness" as the primary means by which the self might grow in its abilities to resist the pressure to adapt to social norms.

While the conditions under which the self grows in its capacity to resist adaptation to normative life will be discussed in more detail in the following pages, Takeo Doi alludes to the problems faced in establishing such conditions. Doi describes nourishing relationality as emotion, the emotion *amae*. All emotions, Doi claims "demonstrate a relationship between the one who feels the emotion and his surroundings" (1973, 167). Emotions never remain confined within the self, nor do they spring from the psyche unbidden and unprompted. Emotionality entails otherness, interruption, and interchange, the very aspects of relationality that both harm and soothe. The particular nature of the *amae* relationship, the *amae* emotion, expresses "an attempt to draw close to the other person" (Doi 1973, 167). The emotion of *amae* thus entails a particular type of relationship with otherness. Doi reminds us that "Amae, in short can only exist when *amae* is permitted"

(1973, 168). The urge to draw close to another entails risk, and only under certain circumstances will the self be inclined to face this danger.

A liberal understanding of the autonomous self as free from otherness, as non-dependent and self-determined, prevents the establishment of an environment that would encourage drawing close to others. Because receptive autonomy, a capacity for creative and critical thought and action, requires a willingness to face the risks of relationality, autonomy, as it is commonly understood, is a self-defeating ideal, and, as will be shown, is assured to lead to fearfulness and compliance.

Oceanic Feeling

While Young-Bruehl suggests that most of Freud's later work departs from the notion of ego receptivity, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud actually describes the condition of infancy in a way that expresses a surprising acknowledgement of the open and loving nature of the ego. Freud's account of the "oceanic feeling" suggests that the ego retains a sense of its initial oneness with the world. In his interpretation of this feeling, one discerns the manner in which Freud's thought vacillates between a reinforcement of liberal individualism and a more subversive account of the self as divided, multifaceted, and only contingently and porously differentiated from the world and the relationships from which it develops.

Freud's explanation of the oceanic feeling challenges the liberal presumption that human beings enter the world as individuals. Freud begins *Civilization and its Discontents* with an explanation of the origin of "the religious feeling" experienced by some as "a feeling

of an indissoluble bond, of a being one with the external world as a whole" (2010, 25). The ego, Freud clarifies, does not begin as something distinct and separate from the surrounding environment. The infant does not initially possess a sense of self, a sense of separateness from the rest of the world. The ego, as a demarcation from the outside, emerges only after the infant learns that she cannot access the mother's breast without an outwardly directed cry for nourishment. The infant's recognition of an "outside" coincides with her recognition of an external object, the mother's breast in this case, "which is only forced to appear by a special action" (Freud 2010, 28). Thus the ego evolves from its primary all-encompassing state into something that *appears* "marked off distinctly from everything else" (Freud 2010, 26). Freud claims that the "present ego-feeling is...only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive...all embracing...feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it" (2010, 29). In some instances, the present ego-feeling, a distinct sense of self, exists alongside a preserved remnant of the initial ego-feeling. This conserved primary ego sensation of being one with the world manifests as the "oceanic" or "religious" feeling. While Freud presents this narrative principally as a response to Romain Rolland's notion of the "oceanic feeling," that is, to explain the psychological roots of religious sensation, he also folds in an indirect acknowledgement of the self's primary unity with its environment.

Here, in his later work, Freud continues to allude to the variable nature of the ego's boundaries in a way that harkens back to his earlier thoughts on love. The inconsistency and permeability of ego boundaries appear quite plainly in this particular psychological state. "At the height of being in love," Freud claims, "the boundary between ego and object, threatens to melt away" (2010, 26). Freud explains that in the experience of love, the self

frequently takes in the beloved object and sets the object up as its own ego ideal, blurring the boundaries between love of the self and love of the other (Freud 1959). While Freud maintains that this blurring of boundaries can be dangerously draining as a deflection of self-love to another, he suggests that *being loved* by another re-enriches the ego's sense of self-love. He explains, "a person who loves has, so to speak, forfeited a part of his narcissism, and it can only be replaced by his being loved" (Freud 1914, 98). Love, in its ideal manifestation, involves both giving and receiving. Freud's account of the primary-ego feeling and its sister sensation, love, portray the ego as strongly receptive and derivative of ontological togetherness.

Both Kaja Silverman and Jonathan Lear suggest that Freud's interest in the oceanic feeling is indicative of his attraction to the idea of a primary interconnectivity intrinsic to human existence. In her investigation of Freud's attentiveness to sensations of unity and interconnectivity, Silverman suggests that Freud, at times, actually provides a convincing alternative to the common understanding of the Freudian ego as possessive and narcissistic (Silverman 2009). Reading between the lines of Freud's account of the imperialistic infant, the infant who believes he *is* the world and that he directs the movements of the breast through his omnipotent thoughts, she gleans an alternative account of emerging selfhood. Freud's reading of Rolland's "oceanic feeling" suggests a profoundly anti-egoistic account of selfhood. Rather than the self that assumes it contains the world, this oceanic sensation alludes to the fact that the world births, contains, and nourishes the self. Silverman explains, that although Freud's use of Rolland evokes a metaphor of limitless, "he is not talking about the manic pleasure of an imperial ego; the oceanic feeling is 'imposed' upon us as a 'fact,' it is a 'sensation' instead of a thought—the

sensation of the ‘contact’ between ourselves and other beings” (2009, 29). Silverman accentuates the sense of ontological relationality implicit in Freud’s notion of selfhood. The self experiences this unbidden sensation of receptivity throughout life. This connectedness, although at times denied in attempts to escape feelings of vulnerability, is precisely what enables the self to exist as an entity capable of receiving, giving to, and pushing back against others.

This sense of connectedness, if affirmed rather than denied, engenders a certain ethical comportment of openness and responsiveness toward the world, a comportment that I describe as receptive autonomy. Yet, alongside this openness, a friction exists between the world and the self. If the self is to emerge as a being in relationality, that is, if it is to become aware of the world, of the other, and subsequently of its existence as an entity, it must learn to experience otherness. This is precisely what I aim to suggest in describing autonomous capacity as enabled through relationality. In my account, the “auto,” or “self” aspect of autonomy does not refer to a pre-given entity, but rather to an entity that potentially emerges through a relationship with what the self comes to know as “other.” It is a matter of no small significance that these relationships that produce the self are characterized by both fortification and loss.

The Critical Ego

In a shared recognition of the ego’s inherent otherness and its tendency to resist the losses this otherness brings, there is a thin sense of continuity between Young-Bruehl’s idea of the ego and the Lacanian ego. Importantly, however, while Lacan stands against the

therapeutic task of strengthening the ego, as he sees the ego as a defensive measure against the vulnerability of the self as well as a source of conformism (1966, 685), Young-Bruehl believes in nourishing the ego, as she views the ego as a relational entity capable of both social compliance and social critique.

Lacan considers the production of the ego that occurs in the mirror stage to amount to a primary “misrecognition” (*méconnaissance*). In Lacan’s mirror phase, in the process of ego formation, the subject emerges as a product of internalized otherness. The subject comes into being as an entity split between its embodied unruliness and a vision of coherent subjectivity—the vision reflected back to it by the mirror of the other (Lacan 1966). Although here the subject exists as a being divided between embodiment and the reflection of this embodiment as experienced in sociality, the subject resists its birth in primary otherness. The subject wrongly identifies with what it “recognizes” in the mirror, an imaginary capable and autonomous self without need for care and nourishment from others (Lacan 1966, 80). This misrecognition founds the ego, the subject’s pivotal point of socially informed efficacy. Because the subject resists the otherness at its core as a corollary process of ego-formation, the ego entails a lack of critical knowledge about the subject’s coming-into-being through the social. The ego remains unaware that it is comprised of otherness, and thus unaware of any possibility of disjoint between the subject and social determination. In this sense, for Lacan, the ego remains an adaptive alienated entity, focused on the impossible task of conforming to the world of the other.

In contrast to Lacan’s inherently misguided and compliant ego, Young-Bruehl suggests that the ego can operate both as an adaptive force *and* as a critically reflective force. She argues that an ego focused on lamenting its less than masterful existence, on

dwelling on the loss and deprivation it has experienced in relationality, tends to submit more readily to commands and authoritarian laws. Unable to tolerate the uncertainty of remaining open to otherness, given the vulnerability such openness would imply, the lamenting ego withers from lack of nourishing relationality, and in its weakened state submits readily to the tyrannies imposed upon it.

This type of adaptive ego develops in a society that idealizes independence as freedom from others and does not recognize the need for cherishment, the significance of loving reciprocity. In such a society, a society that I contend follows liberal ideals of selfhood, one can expect to experience the frustration of one's needs for nourishing relationality. This frustration understandably inspires a turn away from relationality, away from all that might disturb the shelter one has built around oneself as a response to a harsh world. Young-Bruehl and Faith Bethelard suggest that Adolf Eichmann's murderous, yet "banal" adherence to rule-following expresses just this pattern of frustration, withdrawal, and compliance (2000, 230-31). Turned inward and focused on "cherishing rule-obeying, staying unrelated to people by this means, he will do anything that keeps his inner arrangement with himself, his rule-cherishing intact. He envies and attacks any sign of relatedness in the world, anything felt as an impingement on his insulation...." (Young-Bruehl and Faith Bethelard 2000, 230-31). Such a man "is the perfect political agent, a dictator's dream, because he cannot judge anyone or anything outside himself" (Young-Bruehl and Faith Bethelard 2000, 230-31). Frustrated by and fearful of otherness, the ego turns inward and readily adheres to patterns and rules that might provide a sense of regularity and self-sovereignty.

Conversely, in a society where cherishment is recognized and relationality and reciprocity are valued, the ego is much less likely to desperately turn inward and “become hardened in obstinacy” (Young-Bruehl and Faith Bethelard 2000, 210). Instead, an ego in this position would be more “receptive to impressions by help of strict and continuous self-examination” (Young-Bruehl and Faith Bethelard 2000, 210). When otherness does not appear as only threatening and harsh, but also as loving and enriching, the ego resists the tendency to deny its primary entwinement with others and instead lets such otherness inspire deviations from old patterns and taken-for-granted beliefs. In this state, the ego looks quite unlike the Lacanian ego, which fails to embrace its otherness and instead revels in a life-long fantasy of self-sovereignty. For Lacan, the ego entails a necessary misrecognition of selfhood and an adaptive relationship to society. But, for Young-Bruehl the ego might also affirm its otherness, and thus remain open to growth and the reformation of the sociality of which it is a part. Young-Bruehl’s vision of the ego supports my claim that the auto, the self, withers in its capacity for autonomy when it is compelled to turn inward, to reject relationality, and to feel resentful of its own constitutive otherness.

Young-Bruehl’s depiction of the receptive ego clarifies how social-psychic patterns inform the nature of the self’s relational bearings and its capacity for autonomy. In diverging from Lacan in her recognition that ego formation occurs in a particular sociohistorical context and thus guarantees no pre-determined *type* of ego, Young-Bruehl’s work points to the ethical significance of encouraging certain comportments toward loss, longing, and relationality. Would the Lacanian ego tend toward the same deflection of otherness in a society that advocated an openness toward human vulnerability and an affirmation of the otherness that seems to always resist our attempts to domesticate it?

Young-Bruehl's and Lacan's notions of the ego both incorporate a sense of the ego's otherness, its primary relatedness, and its errant tendency to assume or wish for independence from this otherness; the key difference between their two articulations of relationality appears to lie in the Lacanian insistence on the incomplete and negative character of desire—as shaped in relation to the other—and Young-Bruehl's emphasis on growth and repair—as enabled in relation to others. While these two positions seem incompatible, the inclination toward repair, the tendency Melanie Klein characterizes as love, can be thought of as a necessary response to primary and repeatedly relived experiences of loss (Klein and Riviere 1964).

Klein suggests that love derives from our desire to make reparations to our loved ones for our initial resentment of their difference from us, their inability to meet our every need seamlessly. Klein explains that in the process of infantile separation, the infant comes to feel resentful and destructive toward the mother for the mother's failure to perfectly respond to the infant's needs for affection and nourishment. The infant aggressively fantasizes about destroying the mother, but then finds herself terrified at the prospect that she has *actually* destroyed the only source of affection and sustenance she has ever known. Fear, sorrow, and remorse cause the infant to reach out and give love, to show the mother affection in attempt to repent for her initial fantasies of destruction. This cycle of aggression and repair operates throughout our lives and informs how we relate to those to whom we are most deeply attached. (Klein and Riviere 1964).

Loss and the correlative longing for repair compel the self to turn to the world with an expectation to be loved and a desire to give love. A vision of the subject as split and alienated retains elements of longing and repair, while a conceptualization of a loving and

reparative self retains a sense of loss and primal separation. As suggested in the previous chapter, the longing that results from loss, if acknowledged rather than resisted, might compel the self to seek something beyond the given, to move toward a creative reformation of the world in which the self is a part. It is precisely desire that results from loss that permits the self to embody a comportment of autonomy, the capacity to think and move in ways misaligned with normative social patterns and beliefs. In the following section, I turn to Jonathon Lear to articulate yet another manner in which patterns of love and loss enable the self's potential for autonomy.

Love and Loss

Jonathon Lear suggests, as I do, that there are insufficient grounds for presupposing an individuated self capable of self-directed action and thought. Lear asserts that Freud uniquely recognized, contrary to the somewhat common presumption in liberal theory that humans are born as individuated entities, that "being an individual...is a psychological achievement, it is not a given..." (1990, 22-3). Lear connects Freud's insight into the developmental nature of individuality with the importance Freud places on love. For Lear, love, understood in Freudian terms, acts as the central force for individuation, and it is through particular relations of love and the lack of love that the self grows or fails to grow into an individual. Lear's consideration of the role that love plays in individuation supports my examination of how particular modes of being either foster or forestall the development of selves capable of an autonomous comportment.

Lear looks specifically to the intimate link between love and loss to give an account of how love acts as a mutually sustaining source of vitality for the self and for the world. While maintaining a commitment to the ideal of the individual, Lear suggests that the growth and development of the individual necessitates the self's loving investment in the world and the reciprocal internalization of a loving world. In this sense, as I will show, Lear's understanding of the individual departs from any notion of the individual as self-standing or separate from the world of which it is a part.

In his work on Freud's notion of love as a force enabling individuality, Lear plays up psychoanalysis's ambiguous commitment to the idea of the individual. Lear wields this inconsistency, the fact that psychoanalysis is both an expression of bourgeoisie individualism and a project inclined to unravel its own ideological commitment to the individual (Lear 1990), to craft a novel understanding of individuality. Lear's turn to both disassemble and revive the idea of the individual echoes my own aim to re-signify "autonomy," to offer an account of receptive autonomy as a corrective to the self-defeating liberal ideal of autonomy. Of primary concern for my own account is an attentiveness to the conditions that enable self-growth, and thus the capacity for critical deflection of harmful social patterns and tendencies, as well as the creative capacity to produce novel forms of political engagement. Lear focuses precisely on the variant nature of the libidinal currents that either enliven or deaden such capacities for autonomy.

Lear notes that while western society and its scientific practices express a commitment to the ideal of the individual, they do not often inquire into the makings of the individual (1990, 18). Lear observes: "individualistic political philosophies, while paying great attention to individual rights and liberties, tend to remain silent on what individuals

are” (Lear 1990, 19). Focusing on this overlooked aspect of an ostensibly individualistic society, Lear turns to Freud, to consider the particular processes that comprise the individual. He does so, because, as he suggests, from its inception, psychoanalysis has been uniquely concerned with precisely this issue.¹⁰⁵

Lear identifies the conditions required for the emergence of the individual as environmental. Akin to how Young Bruehl’s work emphasizes the necessity of affection for the growth of autonomously enabled selves, Lear suggests that capable individuals require cultivation through love. Highlighting psychoanalysis’s distinctive concern for the context of individual growth, Lear notes “psychoanalysis has discovered that individuals are not part of the basic fabric of the world, not even the basic fabric of human society. That individuals exist depends on the social world nurturing their development, and this is a contingent matter” (1990, 25). As I will show through Lear’s analysis, the existence of individuals, that is, of selves capable of a critical stance toward both social and static self-laws, depends upon a lovable and nurturing environment. Lear argues that this type of capable individual develops through a process of identifying with a loving, yet always disappointing world.

Rather than take self-awareness for granted, Lear examines the processes through which a sense of self emerges. As I discuss in a previous section of this chapter, in the oceanic bliss of undifferentiation, the infant has no sense of self, no sense of a distinction

¹⁰⁵ Winnicott was one of the first analysts to emphasize the profound importance of the environment for the development of the individual. He too declined to take the existence of individuals for granted. He developed a theory concerning the necessity of a containing nurturing environment for the development of healthy individuality. He also stressed the need for such an environment to gradually challenge the omnipotent feelings of the infant. His work shows how it is only through such challenges that the infant learns of otherness, the difference between the world outside and the world within (Winnicott 2005).

between her own being and that of the world around her. The infant exists, without an awareness of external objects, in a state of “libidinal investment that permeates a relationally undifferentiated field” (Lear 1990, 136). Only gradually, due to promptings from the external world—the disappointing unavailability of the breast for example—does the infant begin to sense the separateness of the world around her. Her libidinal investment in nurturance and care (in the breast for instance) makes the infant aware of the “otherness” of the outside world and the “I-ness” of herself.

Lear argues that only in realizing the nature of this libidinal investment, did Freud begin to articulate the emergence of the “I” as dependent on the external world. Freud’s focus on the self as a contextual achievement arises through this insight. Bound together from conception, the world and the individual engage in a “single process by which an I and a world of objects come to be differentiated out of an undifferentiated psychic field” (Lear 1990, 137). Without the world’s promptings, without a world worthy of libidinal investment, the self never fully realizes its efficacy and strength as a differentiated being.

In this manner, Lear argues that the existence of individuals is contingent on the presence of a nurturing environment. Without a responsive world, or conversely, a receptive posture toward a responsive world, the self fails to thrive. Even beyond infancy, the self requires a reciprocal relation of loving receptivity with the world. Lear argues, “For expansion to take place, the world itself must maintain a certain responsiveness to and reflecting of the emerging person. It must respond to his emerging curiosity and interests, and, in so responding, reflect them.” (1990, 154). The world must in this sense be, “a *good-enough world*...For the I, Freud says ‘living means the same as being loved’” (Lear 1990,

154). What comprises this loving world remains somewhat undetermined.¹⁰⁶ But, surely, the social discouragement of acknowledging vulnerability and of experimenting with comportments of empathy deters the coming-into-being of such a world. Nurture, for Lear, comes in the form of love. Without love, both the self and the world cease to fully exist for one another.

While the world must show its beneficence, it must also disappoint. For the self to emerge and realize its own differentiated capacities, the world must counter its sense of omnipotence. Here, we see the uncomfortable, yet necessary, privation element of nourishment. As the discussion of Copjec and Lacan in the previous chapter indicates, it is only through a sense of lack, a sense of disjuncture between the self's embodied existence and the terms given to signify and experience such an existence that the self emerges as a distinct component of its environment. In this sense, the self is born through a process of differentiation that at times feels like alienation. The world must prove its existence to the self to enable the self to obtain its own existence as a distinctive entity (Lear 1990, 156-159). Lear notes, "it is from the disappointment that the breast cannot forever magically meet the infant's wishful lips that the infant begins to differentiate himself from the world" (1990, 157). Freud discovered that these very disappointments pave the way to the development of the self's psychic landscape in his work on melancholia.

In cases of melancholia, Freud observed, rather than acknowledge a loss of love, rather than mourn the loss of a loved entity, the patient would take the lost loved object

¹⁰⁶ Lear brings up Rene Spitz's work, which revealed that infants deprived of loving responsiveness yet given the nutrients typically required for sustenance often died. Spitz's work highlights the fact that a responsive psychological world cannot be sundered from, nor deemed less crucial for human survival, than a materially adequate habitat (Spitz 1945).

into himself. This process of love, loss, and internalization occurred, as “the melancholic had been in love with someone, but had suffered some blow or loss. Instead of displacing his love onto another person, the melancholic withdrew his love and his loved one into himself” (Lear 1990, 159-60). Thus, Lear explains, “the loved one was now part of the melancholic’s own I...Freud called this identification, and he explained it as the outcome of disappointment in love” (Lear 1990, 159). While initially Freud had discovered identification through his researches into deviations of mourning, he came to appreciate it as “normal process by which an I comes to be” (Lear 1990, 160). All of psychoanalysis expands upon this realization, that “psychic structure...is created by a dialectic of love and loss. The structure of the mind is an inner recreation of the structure of the loved world” (Lear 1990, 160). Selfhood occurs only through the experience of disappointed love.¹⁰⁷ The world comes into being for the infant, as a site of disappointed libidinal investment, in the same instance that a sense of self occurs. Through this process of love and loss, the “I,” as an internalization of the loving, yet disappointing world, is born.

Lear argues, that it is the quality of the relationship between the self and the world that enables a loving posture of selfhood. The self must experience the world as loveable enough, and the degree to which the world is lovable determines the strength of the self’s loving attachment to the world. In turn, the very nature of the world that is internalized determines the self’s capacity for love. If the world loves enough, the self internalizes a loving posture. Yet, if the world is cold and unreceptive, the self only weakly experiences its

¹⁰⁷ Judith Butler famously describes the emergence of gendered subjects as a process of melancholic loss and incorporation. Because we are socially barred from loving someone of the same sex, the possibility of homosexual attachment is lost to us. Yet, rather than detaching from this potentially loved object of the same sex, we identify with it and take it into ourselves. Thus, women become women and men become men (Butler 1990; 1997).

own selfhood and internalizes a disinterested posture toward otherness. In Lear's account, love directly links the development of individuality to relational responsibility.

Lear specifically ties his notion of individuation to the emergence of an autonomous self by insisting on the importance of the loss of love that occurs in the process of differentiation. By turning to the place of loss in the process of internalization, Lear helps clarify how the self, although composed of otherness, can nevertheless engage in autonomous thought and action. Because the infant inherently experiences disappointment, the realization that total self-sovereignty is illusory in a world of otherness, what the infant internalizes is not exactly *identical* with the external world. What comprises selfhood is both a sense of loss and of identity, a sense of self-concern, and of concern for the world. The relative strength of these concerns is dependent on the level of mutual love experienced between infant and world.

Even beyond infancy, Lear argues, the self internalizes dictates and norms of society in an inexact manner. Lear suggests, that this disjoint enables self-guided judgment. He explains, "the super-I is not merely the intra psychic manifestation of values, ideals, prohibitions; it is the internalization of an observer of self" (Lear 1990, 208). Rather than an exact replication of social dictates, this internal observer is neither completely one's own nor completely other than one's own. Lear adds that this whole process takes place within a condition of love. Critical capacity is enriched through love. Lear explains how love encourages self-concern, the capacity for reflection on one's own values through a self-observing agency that is neither entirely self-identical nor entirely other. He states:

Self-concern begins with an internalization of the loving environment. This begins a process of differentiation from the environment by which an ever more complex human being is able to differentiate himself still more from a loving environment...In this way, love promotes autonomy. For the successful outcome of

this interactive process between external and internalized love is an autonomous individual: one who may care for and depend on his environment, but one who has essentially differentiated himself from it" (1990 209).

In experiencing a challenge to its omnipotence, the self learns of otherness. This otherness, once experienced as something different from the self, as something that is indeed at times, absent, missing, and lost, is internalized. Otherness, in being experienced as something that is "not me" is precisely what comprises the psyche of the self. The self is built in otherness and loss. Yet, it is exactly because the self internalizes both the loss and the love of the world that its psyche retains a dissident relationship with the world. The self is not a socially determined being, but rather a folding in of difference *and loss*.

The psyche, rather than an exact internalized replica of social norms is the internalization of these norms along with their inevitable failure, their disjoint with the experience of infantile omnipotence. This disjoint might inspire a sense of ill-fit with social custom and thus enable resistance to and the reformulation of social meaning. Yet, this sense of ill-fit, this attentiveness to the ways that the world *is not the self*, only manifests when one inhabits a position of ethical openness to others, to otherness.

Surely, a liberal society, which values an atomistic and self-determined state of being, works to discourage the acceptance of the relationality so crucial to the self's potential for autonomy. As I will explain in the next section, the liberal vision of autonomy does indeed encourage a deflection of the loss and otherness at the heart of the potentially receptive autonomous self.

Flight from Freedom

The self emerges into relations where it repeatedly experiences disappointment, loss, and uncertainty. Assuming a posture of openness to relationality means to some extent claiming these vulnerabilities and dependencies and relinquishing any illusion of self-sovereignty. A society that disparages dependency, that does not significantly value forms of collective social support, and also lacks a general concern for maternal and child welfare is unlikely to foster an environment conducive to the self's affirmation of vulnerability. Liberal values of individualism and self-sufficiency, as well as this parallel lack of concern for communal well-being, create an environment of insecurity and fear, an environment more conducive to the denial of interdependence than to its acceptance.

Experiencing the world as a place bereft of nourishing relationality compels the self to employ defenses that actually weaken its capacities to resist and reformulate the very social patterns that have led it into this trap of defensiveness. Caught in a cycle of fear, enclosure, and enervation, the defensive self loses its capacity for self-direction. In order to gather its bearings, the fearful self submits to the imagined power found in identifying with influential personas and ideals, deflects vulnerability onto otherness, and turns further away from relationality.

Young-Bruehl and Faith Bethelard elaborate on the psychic processes that lead to this deflection of relationality. Unfulfilled desires to experience loving responsiveness result in the self's expectation to be rejected and abandoned. As a defense against what it perceives as a dangerous and risky relationality, the self becomes unreceptive, cut off, and turns away from that which might nourish it. Bethelard elaborates on the submissive

tendencies she sees produced by a societal resistance to interdependence and vulnerability. With a Hegelian turn of phrase, Bethelard states, “In therapy, most people come in speaking a language of expectation of rejection, words they feel hard-hearted inside of—and this is rather like speaking the language of dominant culture, speaking like a slave. Or like someone enslaved to acting like a master” (Young-Bruehl and Faith Bethelard, 2000, 48). In a state of hard-heartedness, the stifled self is cut off from the ability to both give and receive cherishment. Expecting disappointment and rejection, given the dangerous and risky terms of relationality, the self flees from the very conditions that enable a self-directed mode of being. In this way, Young Bruehl and Bethelard explain what Erich Fromm will merely assume: that the self fears, to a greater or lesser degree, freedom. Because the ability to question and resist established ways of being, the way the world appears to carry on, requires “being able to be receptive and open to the world even when it is dangerous and threatening” (Young-Bruehl and Faith Bethelard, 2000, 249), societies that dismiss the need for nourishment and thus heighten feelings of groundlessness and insecurity rarely foster the growth of independent-minded selves.

In a society such as ours, which celebrates the possibilities and profits associated with late capitalism and underplays the outsourcing of economic contingencies onto marginal populations, responsibility for personal risk and the idea of self-sufficiency rule all aspects of political, economic, and social life. Vulnerability has increased, while acknowledgement of human interdependence has become increasingly rare. From the decline of the welfare state to the transformation of the individual into an entrepreneurial being, solely accountable for all failures and successes, contemporary neo-liberal principles, as well as more passé, but still potent beliefs in hardened individualism, work to

discourage ties of solidarity and mutual responsibility. In this condition of heightened exposure and decreased social support, fear (often unacknowledged) and uncertainly compel the self to seek defensive shelter in *any relation* that might provide even a modicum of stability and assurance.

In its search for security, the self finds, not palliative and loving social support, but, the opportunity to align with the prevailing values of individualism and wealth-accumulation and the authoritative personas that flaunt these principles. Adorno describes these two seemingly opposed qualities—independence and conformity—as existing side-by-side in American society. “In the dominant American ideology,” he states, “we find cheek by jowl the demand for a rugged individualism, that is to say, the energetic, unruly individual who is not afraid to use his elbows, and on the other hand, the insistence on adjustment, in other words, on the conforming individual” (Adorno 2006, 212). Far from unrelated, these ideals sustain one another. As the self suffers in an individualistic society hostile to its needs to nourish and be nourished, it turns away from others. As it turns away from others, it receives ideological validation in acting in accordance with the societal idealization of individualism. In this manner, the self flees from freedom in the pursuit of the false freedom purchased in conformism. Thus, a defensive flight from otherness comes at the cost of the self’s potential for autonomy.

Donald Trump’s success as a Republican presidential candidate attests to the pervasiveness of fear and parallel lack of autonomous capacity in our society. Appealing to the great anxieties of white working and middle-class Americans—brought about by economic instability and demographic threats to white masculinity—Trump has styled himself as a proxy for security and authority. In his denigration of women and people of

color of all genders, he ideologically severs himself from the “weak,” who are in reality just the people saddled with his followers’ deflected vulnerability. Pointedly, Trump acts as an identificatory figure of triumphant masculinity to ease his supporters’ fears about the imagined potency and prowess of the other—the “rapist” Mexican, the Black gangbanger, and the big man with a big stick, the United States Government. Trump’s bigoted attitude increases his attractiveness as a figure of unconditional power in which people might find relief from the anxieties produced by a culture that values autonomy—encourages it and finds dependency pathological—but precludes autonomy’s realization through an enculturation of fear and a normalization of inequity. Rather than face the ambiguities that accompany the responsibility of free-thought and action, Trump offers a place of security and reassurance where one can discard these burdens—made harder to bear by a culture that denies their existence— and submit to a figure of self-confident tenacity. In Trump, we see groundlessness coupled with an ideology of self-determination transformed into the abnegation of free thought and an embrace of illusory self-sovereignty.

In *Escape from Freedom*, Erich Fromm details precisely how a specific social-historical trajectory has led to this societal flight from freedom. For Fromm, individuation, which he sees as a prerequisite for mature individuality, is inescapably accompanied by feelings of vulnerability and insecurity.¹⁰⁸ While Fromm, in my opinion, erroneously contrasts infantile attachment with a later state of developmental independence (which he portrays as inherently individualistic) (1941, 29-35), he does provide insight into how

¹⁰⁸ Fromm, a social psychologist and psychoanalyst associated with the Frankfurt School, shows a surprising commitment to individualism given his theoretical basis in Marxist thought. Some, including Cushman, criticize him for his focus on individuality and suggest that this bias toward individualism points to his unacknowledged compliance with liberal ideals. (Cushman 1995, 180). However, I find that his notion of the individual, while problematic in some ways, is not wholly aligned with the liberal vision of the individual as self-determined and ahistorical.

social patterns brought about by capitalism have led to increasing isolation and consequently to conformism.

Fromm argues that legacies of Protestantism, and later capitalism, have molded the general western character into one that seeks to always serve “a purpose outside of himself,” (Fromm 1941, 110) first in submission to God and later in submission to capitalist expediencies. Fromm claims that because the capitalist system makes the accumulation of capital the aim, the end goal, of all economic enterprise, “it has become man’s fate to contribute to the growth of the economic system, to amass capital, not for the purposes of his own happiness or salvation, but as an end in itself” (Fromm 1941, 110). Capitalism, Fromm suggests, “has made man work for extrapersonal ends, made him a servant to the very machine he built, and thereby has given him a feeling of insignificance and powerlessness” (Fromm 1941, 112). Accustomed to submission and isolated by growing inequality and increasing economic insecurity, in our “aloneness and powerlessness, we are ready to get rid of our individual self either by submission to new forms of authority or by a compulsive conforming to accepted patterns” (Fromm 1941, 134). This submission to authority and custom is the masochistic path of avoiding freedom.

Fromm expresses the dependent nature of both masochistic and sadistic tendencies and claims that hierarchies of submission and domination deprive all parties of freedom. Just as the masochist seeks to dissolve the self through submission to prevailing customs and beliefs, so too does the sadist compromise his selfhood by swallowing the empty submissiveness of others, eventually completely losing any sense of the himself outside of this vampiric form of sustenance. Fromm states, “the sadistic person needs his object as much as the masochist needs his. Only instead of seeking security by being swallowed, he

gains it by swallowing somebody else. In both cases the integrity of the individual self is lost” (Fromm 1941, 157). In fleeing from the anxiety that comes with living in world hostile to the self’s ability to thrive, the self loses its potential for truly self-directed thought and action, if, in the end, it does not dissolve entirely.

While Fromm, like Young-Bruehl, recognizes the falsity of equating love and relationality with weakness rather than self-growth, he neglects the indispensable value of *receptivity*. Fromm affirms that individuals need communal ties to survive, that man “has no choice but to unite himself with the world in the spontaneity of love and productive work or else seek a kind of security by such ties with the world as destroy his freedom and the integrity of his individual self (Fromm 1941, 21). Fromm recognizes that individuality requires loving interconnection; yet, he fails to appreciate the full scope of love as dependent on that which is taken in and that which is given back. He claims, “love is an activity, not a passive affect; it is a ‘standing in,’ not a falling for...love is primarily giving, not receiving” (Fromm 1956, 21). In his move to declare love as “standing, not falling,” as intentional, not contingent, and as mono-directional, not reciprocal, Fromm accedes to a gendered understanding of love’s power.

Ironically presenting a mother’s giving of herself as the pinnacle of loving conduct, in that such giving expresses richness and potency (Fromm 1956, 21-22), Fromm idealizes the masculine coded trait of activeness and devalues the feminine coded trait of receptiveness—a position between passivity and activity. In missing the indispensability of a receptive approach to relationality for self-growth, Fromm fails to fully develop his concern for the common “fear of freedom.” While he recognizes that this fear stems from the dread of vulnerability, he fails to see this heightened sense of fear as a consequence of

the continued denial of the human condition of dependency. Insisting that love presupposes the attainment of a predominantly “productive orientation” in which a “person has overcome dependency” (1956, 24), Fromm continues the tradition of the “hard heart,” the rejection of dependence and the refusal of the relationality that enables the expression of both love and freedom.

Contrary to Fromm’s understanding of love as a purely active capacity of the ego, Young-Bruehl’s notion of love suggests that relational encounters, receptivity, and circular currents of affection build and enrich the ego. Of course, her notion of the ego as primarily receptive appears alien in a society ruled by a normatively utilitarian and economic understanding of humanity. Young-Bruehl argues that modern civilization encourages ceaseless activity, hyper-communication, and a generally frenzied existence. In this environment, “reflective, unhectic, receptive thought” (Young-Bruehl 2003, 38) becomes nearly impossible and meaningful connections and ego-enhancing relationships suffer.

This single-minded focus on productivity, on accumulating various kinds of capital, feeds ideologies of self-focus and self-improvement. In its normative view of the self as a rather atomistic completely malleable entity, such a culture drains away the psychic space necessary for the contemplation of others, otherness, other ways of being. A veneration of self-determination habitually leads to a disavowal or projection of dependence or arouses a sense of deep shame if dependence is acknowledged. All such attitudes lead to a competitive and individualizing environment evocative of feelings of suspicion and distrust toward otherness.

Takeo Doi claims that dismissive attitudes about relationality coevolve with a socio-linguistic tendency to deny dependency. Unlike Americans, Doi states, the Japanese have a

word “*amae*” to designate the expectation to be indulged and cherished sweetly.

Accordingly, “whereas in Japan human relations of a dependent nature are worked into the social norm, in the West they are excluded” (Doi 1973, 169). Yet, “even in Western societies where there is no convenient word corresponding to *amae* and feelings of *amae* would seem not to exist, a surprising amount of similar kind of feeling can be observed if one looks at the phenomenon with Japanese eyes.... *Amae* here is not an experienced emotion, but a hidden wish...” (Doi 1973, 169). The very absence of a word for the *amae* emotion in English indicates the English-speaking world’s desire to disavow dependency.

When the word “dependence” does appear in American and British psychoanalytic parlance, it carries negative and pathologizing connotations of neediness and weakness. The anxiety concerning vulnerability shows, as “independence is valued. ‘Autonomy’ is a plus. ‘Vulnerability’ only means danger, it does not imply receptivity.’ Prolonged dependency equals being spoiled, being entrapped, no matter what the dependency is actually like; the judgment is tout court” (Young-Bruehl and Faith Bethelard 2000, 50). In such an atmosphere of denial, both children and adults learn to feel ashamed of their expectations to be loved. The denial of the need for cherishment or *amae* engenders a number of psychopathologies of the ego.

In being discouraged to affirm the need for love, we remain restricted in our abilities to both give and receive cherishment and, therefore, deprived of the conditions required for a true sense of self. In a society that denies the existence of *amae*, a person’s “pursuit of *amae* tends to become self-centered, and he seeks fulfilment by becoming one with some object or other that he has fixed on by himself. There develops in him a pronounced tendency to cling to something” (Doi 1973, 132). The unfulfilled desire for relational

support encourages a flight from freedom, a desperate clinging to the ways of others in compensation for a lack of self. In this manner, the denial of the need for nurturance, produced by a liberal capitalist system that functions through an idealization of non-dependence, leads to weakened, restricted, and compliant selves.

Self as a Citadel

The social rejection of human need and fragility reveals itself in collective social defense mechanisms that work to dispel the vulnerability intrinsic to relationality and to outsource this vulnerability onto those communities and individuals deemed “other.” The weakened self feels the need for security all the more strongly; deprived of the ability to engage in nourishing and strengthening relations with others, it tends to fortify its boundaries to avoid the dangerous world of relationality. Unfortunately, as Freud recognized long ago, these defenses most often compromise the vital integrity of the self.

Political theorist Wendy Brown describes how a global preoccupation with wall-building functions in contemporary societies as a counterproductive form of social-psychic defense. She suggests that the myth of state sovereignty has faced further unraveling in the presence of heightened transnational exposure to the contingencies produced by late capitalism. In response to such challenges to state-boundaries, many western states have engaged in frantic and episodic wall building and surveillance projects aimed to deflect insecurity onto the “outsider,” the alien other. These practices, Brown suggests, seek to provide a fantasy of containment, “in the face of an increasingly unbounded and

uncontrolled global order” (2010, 118). Brown goes on to argue, through Freud, that such defenses, in reality, serve to decrease the vibrancy and resilience of the entities they are meant to protect. Rather than shoring up state sovereignty, newly built walls further weaken state power. Citing Israeli and American border fortifications, Brown argues that walls “codify the conflicts to which they respond as permeant and unwinnable” (2010, 84) and increase vigilantism and criminality at the sites on which they are built. Here, she brings to light the great paradox of the defensive reaction—that it harms that which was to be saved from harm.

The historical situation in which we find ourselves, a world of increasingly unequal distributions of survivability, certainly produces defensive reactions. Yet, focusing solely on the macro-political context in which these provocations to defensiveness occur partially overlooks the psychic tendencies that underlie these trends. In returning to the way in which the historical-social environment births and lives within the self, I highlight the micro-political practices that feed into society-wide patterns that encourage the deflection of vulnerability onto otherness. This deflection not only weakens those it is meant to protect; it also robs those constructed as marginal of the social nourishment necessary for agential capacity.

The intricacies of psychic defenses suggest that these practices profoundly affect one’s capacity for autonomy—that is, the ability to resist and reconfigure destructive elements of the social environment. Freud indicates that the difficulties produced by psychic defenses stem from these defenses’ potentially counterproductive nature. He defines ego defense mechanisms, in broad terms, as the self’s efforts to ward off unpleasant sensations, emotions, or thoughts (Freud, 1912). The self engages in a variety of defense

mechanisms, including repression, denial, projection, displacement, and sublimation, in its efforts to avoid displeasure or psychic harm. With the exception of sublimation, Freud maintains that these defense mechanisms actually have an *enervative* effect on the self.¹⁰⁹ This is the paradox of defense mechanisms. Whereas the self cannot help but employ some degree of resistance to harm, and indeed this is necessary for the self's survival, particular manifestations of defense have an especially costly effect on the self's energetic reserves (Freud 1937).¹¹⁰ These defenses often persist, past their period of usefulness, "bringing about an ever more extensive alienation from the external world and a permanent weakening of the ego" (Freud 1937, 238). In a state of heightened defensiveness, the self remains trapped in a type of egoistic infantilism. It becomes drained of energy, resistant to otherness, and disinclined to give care. Not only does the excessively defensive self lose the ability to take in nourishment, it concedes the ability to offer it back to the world. Specifically, the defense mechanisms of denial and projection work on a wider social level to vastly impair the overall development of autonomous capacities.

Feminist psychoanalysts Jessica Benjamin and Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel explain how the defenses of denial and projection work through a sexed distribution of social vulnerability, that is, how the denial of vulnerability works in tandem with the projection of such vulnerability onto the feminine character. Their work alludes to how a socially encouraged gendered denial of dependency shrinks the self's capacity for agency. They expose how the rejection of dependence, in this case, imagined as dependence upon the all-

¹⁰⁹ Anna Freud further develops this theory of ego defenses in *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (1993).

¹¹⁰ Wilhelm Reich argues that defensiveness, as character resistance, is encouraged by a historically authoritarian and non-receptive society that seeks to repress instincts. He notes how such a society prevents self-growth and thus the capacity for critical agency (Reich 1972).

powerful maternal character, while it is an effort to efface infantile helplessness, actually weakens the subject's sense of self. I read both theorists' construction of this rejection of dependency, not as a way to naturalize the position of the mother or the feminine, but as a way to elucidate how a patriarchal culture that values and genders certain traits as feminine, continues to socially disseminate and perpetuate hierarchies of gender and agency at the psychic level.

Chasseguet-Smirgel conveys how the masculine position, in its defensive rejection of vulnerability and projection of such vulnerability onto the feminine position, deprives feminized subjects of social and cultural power. She locates these very moves of refusal and projection in Freud's theory of femininity. Freud's theory of phallic monism, his assumption that children of all genders recognize only the penis or the absence of the penis, while having no knowledge of the vagina as an entirely other genital structure, partakes in this masculine tendency of defensiveness.

Chasseguet-Smirgel states that Freud's theory of phallic monism persists, despite countless clinical and theoretical evidence to suggest children are aware of the vagina, because this theory operates as a powerful defensive measure for both boy and girl children against the formidable and feared mother-figure.¹¹¹ The denial of childhood knowledge of the vagina serves to privilege the penis as phallus and construct the feminine position as castrated (Chasseguet-Smirgel 1976). This construction of the feminine position depicts the mother as wounded and lacking, thus denying maternal agency and offering a reprieve from the neediness and vulnerability that is experienced in infancy and continues throughout life. Chasseguet-Smirgel finds that Freud's "blind spots" with respect to

¹¹¹ Karen Horney developed an early version of the theory of masculine defensiveness (Horney 1973).

femininity serve a defensive purpose. She states, “the theory of sexual phallic monism (and its derivatives) seems to me to eradicate the narcissistic wound which is common to all humanity and springs from the child’s helplessness, a helplessness which makes him completely dependent on his mother” (Chasseguet-Smirgel 1976, 281). This dependent position, this necessity for the other, need not only be imagined with respect to the actual mother. Care-taking positions, culturally understood as maternal, including social welfare programs, universal healthcare, and domestic work, might also be seen as threatening and thus defensively interpreted as insignificant in a society that fears dependency and vulnerability. While Chasseguet-Smirgel alludes to the dangers of this gendered flight from dependence and its negative implications for women, she does not fully delve into the detrimental effects of disavowals of vulnerability on agential capacity in general.

Benjamin refers to the early insights of Chasseguet-Smirgel regarding the gendered denial of vulnerability, while also exploring this denial’s costly effects on the self’s efficacy and potential for growth. Benjamin articulates this problem as it is presented in the boy’s Oedipal phase when he is led by a heteronormative society to disidentify with the ideal nurturing mother and identify with the ideal agential father. In this process, the boy must project all aspects of dependency and vulnerability onto womankind, in an effort to shore up a sense of masculinity, his sense of self-determined autonomy and freedom from vulnerability (Benjamin 1998, 30-31). Fearing the all-powerful agency of the nurturing or denying mother, the boy is compelled to identify with the father, while turning the mother figure and then all women into passive entities of object love. The boy child’s fear of the mother is socially embedded; “she stands as the prototype of the undifferentiated object. She serves as their other, their counterpart, the side of themselves they repress” (Benjamin

1988, 77).^{112, 113} Thus, the position of the feminine as passive and weak “may be seen...as the effect of a male construction of culture in accord with the Oedipal boy’s anxieties” (Benjamin, 1998, 57). This forced heteronormative choice between identification and object love hinders the boy’s capacity to identify as a containing and nurturing lover and simultaneously burdens the girl child with his deflected vulnerability (Benjamin 1998, 51).

The boy child remains lacking in a sense of containment. He will fail to sense his actions and thoughts as originating from his own being. He will lack the sensation of truly authoring the movements of his life. Benjamin explains, without an identification with receptive capacities “active subjectivity is thinned to a defensive construct” (Benjamin 1998, 77). If lacking in an identification with the liminal space between freedom from and freedom to, that is a sense of containment, the self fails to grow into a truly agential being.^{114, 115} The defensive self suffers from a deficit of self-holding, a sense of protection, and from a sense of disjoint between its being and its doing. In this state the self lacks confidence and agency—the very ability to respond to and encounter the other. In an effort to repel the resulting feeling of helplessness, the defensive self unproductively tries to project and deflect its condition of dependency. As we have seen, this process leaves

¹¹² Kristeva similarly argues that the masculine subject position is achieved through the abjection of the maternal, the feminine (Kristeva 1982).

¹¹³ Elizabeth Grosz also points out that bodily fluids associated with the feminine are considered abject because they attest to the porousness and the dependency of the subject, bodily aspects which threaten the masculine subject’s “aspiration toward autonomy and self-identity” (Grosz 1994, 193-4).

¹¹⁴ Similarly, Winnicott argues that the indispensable transitional move toward self-containment stems from a nurturing relationship with a maternal figure. He also suggests that the analytic environment can serve as a transitional space to facilitate a greater capacity for self-containment and personal efficacy (Winnicott 2005).

¹¹⁵ Nancy Luxon discusses this environment of containment in reference to the potentially empowering nature of the analytic relationship (Luxon 2013).

subjects in the masculine position without a receptive space of nurturance, and conversely, subjects in the feminine position as holders of disavowed dependence.

In the Hegelian sense, the Oedipal phase leaves only two, un-free categories of subjects, masters and servants. This process, Benjamin notes, dramatizes how “the denial of the need for nurturance takes a tremendous toll on those who live by it, as well as on those who cannot or will not live up to it” (1988, 178). The continued overvaluation of self-determination in ideologically liberal societies requires a hierarchy of difference in order to deflect dependency onto an “other.” The result is a social pattern of denial and projection—ironically predicated on the normalization of autonomy as freedom from dependence—that deteriorates the capacity for critical autonomy of all selves embedded in such an environment.

When the ideal of autonomy signifies non-dependence, as it does in most strains of liberal political thought, it operates paradoxically as an ideological support for conditions that inspire obedience and compliance. Ideals that venerate the self-standing subject work to create an environment of fear, uncertainty, and denial, an environment that discourages openness to nurture and thus enfeebles capacities for self-directed action and thought. In contrast to such ideals, I have detailed the value of a psychoanalytic account that depicts the self as necessarily vulnerable, but also efficacious in remaining open to this very vulnerability. Only under conditions of adequate nourishment and care does the self tend to open to the relationality that enables and strengthens its ability to challenge the norms of the society from which it emerges. The establishment of networks of nourishment in all forms, including universal access to healthcare, child care, and housing, as well as a general cultural willingness to recognize the incredible specificity of such values of nourishment

must underlie any commitment we profess to have to the creation of a society of autonomously enabled citizens.

Psychoanalysis, as a practice that interrogates processes of self-formation, reveals how social distributions of nourishment determine the very characteristics of selfhood, the self's potential abilities and capacities. The self's capacity for autonomy depends upon the creation of social practices and forms of governance that work to rectify unequal distributions of social nourishment. The roots of unjust patterns of nourishment derive from a cultural celebration of self-determination and a devaluation of interdependence. Such paradigms of individualism cannot adequately be challenged or remedied without a parallel consideration of the gendered nature of our ideals of care and autonomy. Until receptivity and autonomy are recognized as *mutually enabling*, self-defeating models of autonomy will continue to work against the proliferation of selves actually capable of critiquing and creatively reworking dominant cultural beliefs.

The promise of critical capacity and creative agency lies behind my interest in reworking the notion of autonomy. A comportment of receptive autonomy would entail the ability to challenge established ways of thinking and living that cause us to remain dependent upon what is and unable to work toward what we hope for ourselves and for others. As I show in the following chapter, an ethical comportment of receptive autonomy frees us from the constraints of the socially possible and allows us to create new modes of being hitherto thought to be impossible.

Chapter Four: Love: An Unsettling Comportment of Receptive Autonomy

Drawing from feminist, queer, and psychoanalytic theory, the preceding chapters sketch the contours of a relational self and present the ways in which such a self might come to embody a comportment of receptive autonomy. In this chapter, I elaborate further on the pathways that lead to this comportment of autonomy and consider the political implications of this ethical approach to otherness. To bring these reflections to life, I look to a specific historical event that bears the marks of this ethical comportment of autonomy. I read the recent uprising in West Baltimore, following the death of Freddie Gray, a Black man killed while in police custody, as an enactment of an ethics of receptive autonomy.

Against a liberal understanding of autonomy as self-sovereignty, I argue that disruptions to illusions of self-sovereignty, brought about by the disintegrative and unifying effects of relationality, actually create the conditions for receptive autonomy. As I will continue to explain, the felt presence of otherness enables one to resist, remake, and create the social laws that constitute one's political world.

In this chapter, I show how receptivity to otherness engenders both sensations of interrelation and differentiation. These seemingly conflicting sensations come together in the psychoanalytic characterization of love—a vision of love as both a self-integrative and a self-disintegrative force. Opposing an idealization of love as a solely unifying force as well as an understanding of autonomy as self-determination, I further develop my notion of receptive autonomy as stimulated by the influence of love.

Drawing from the work of theorists not known for their articulations of individuality, but for their emphasis on social dissent, desire, and the erotic, I suggest that it is openness to the risk and negativity characteristic of disruptions to the self's integrity that enables the adoption of an ethical autonomous comportment. Encounters that shake the self from its sense of enclosure and security create the conditions that allow the self to approach harmful social directives¹¹⁶ as foreign to the self, and thus as injunctions to be disregarded or refigured. Looking to the uprising in West Baltimore following the death of Freddie Gray¹¹⁷ as an exemplar of an ethics of receptive autonomy, I articulate how this comportment of autonomy enables actions that can produce radical social change.

I begin with an elaboration of an anti-adaptation theorization of social change, as presented in Lacan's understanding of the ethical intent of psychoanalysis. Through the work of Lacanian Alenka Zupančič, I depict the analytic encounter—an encounter that aims to allow in otherness, disruption, and facilitate change—as a prototype for a comportment of receptive autonomy. I develop this picture of receptive autonomy, as allied with psychoanalysis, by reading the actions of the Baltimore rioters as similar to the psychoanalytic work that enables analysands to express autonomy—to reject the social

¹¹⁶ In chapter two, I discuss the Lacanian approach to the creation of social beings, which differs from Foucault's theory of subjects as produced by techniques of power. Foucault discusses his account of the subject in "The Subject and Power" (1982). While Lacan, like Foucault, does claim that subjects are shaped by existence in the social, he expresses the highly significant caveat that this construction always misses its mark. While subjects submit to the social-symbolic discourse of the "Other," part of their being fails to obey the rules. Part of the self remains incoherent within the social-historical situation into which the subject is born. Žižek summarizes his Lacanian opposition to Foucault's account of the subject in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989). I discuss the subject's incoherence with respect to social meaning as a site for the subject's freedom.

¹¹⁷ Freddie Gray was an African American man who died of spinal cord injuries on April 19, 2015, while in police custody. The suspicious circumstances of his death have since led to the six officers involved in his arrest and containment to face charges ranging from second-degree murder to manslaughter and criminal negligence.

scripts provided to them and to rewrite and create their own interpretations and narratives.

Developing this account of the uprising as both disruptive and productive, I suggest that the conditions that led up to the Baltimore uprising, and the uprising itself can be read as instances of “creative maladjustment.” Borrowing the phrase “creative maladjustment” from Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1967 address to the American Psychological Association, I contend that the riots of April 2015, like the riots discussed by King, express a productive refusal to adapt to a pathological social system. The Baltimore riots convey both refusal and creativity. The creative element appears in the rioters and protesters’ determination to autonomously write new codes of social meaning through the dissemination of self-created narratives about the riots, the general uprising, and life in West Baltimore.

A Lacanian understanding of ethical action as necessarily self-disruptive, as necessarily “pathological” in the eyes of normative society, helps account for the media’s depiction of the riots as unwarranted and unproductive. I counter the media portrayals of the riots as purely self-destructive and devoid of positive affect by suggesting that the riots and the events surrounding them actually express a kind of love, a willingness to experience the type of self-disruption and self-empowerment that love brings. In conclusion, I contend that my notion of receptive autonomy, while invoking a stance of dissidence, a mode of contestation toward accustomed ways of being, is also a summons to love, a summons to allow otherness to startle us and shift us away from what is and has been. I end by considering the significant political consequences of receptive autonomy as a comportment created in openness to both pleasurable and unsettling self-disruptions and as a comportment productive of dissent and social change.

A Refusal

The Baltimore uprising of April 2015 began just days following the death of Freddie Gray, a Black man killed while in the custody of the Baltimore Police Department. Protesters gathered from across Baltimore to express exasperation and sorrow over Gray's death at the hands of the police. Many involved in the protests voiced a deep awareness of the structural violence and racism that had led to Gray's arrest, detainment, and ultimately, to his death (Coates 2015b; Hazzard 2015). In this state of heightened consciousness concerning systemic injustice, frustration grew, and citizens in West Baltimore, where Gray lived and was later arrested, began to destroy property and take items from nearby stores and a local mall.

In what follows, I will refer to these specific events as riots, as incidents forming part of a larger collective uprising disruptive of routine social functioning.¹¹⁸ Designating these actions as riots, I intend to stress their *impassioned, disruptive, and warranted* nature. Diverging from a paradigm that would evacuate emotionality from the realm of the political, I read such actions as both emotionally-charged and politically significant performances of refusal. The actions of the rioters can be read as an ardent "No!" to the demands of a society dependent upon the exploitation and incarceration of Black citizens. In forsaking calls to continue protesting in "acceptable" and "non-violent" ways, rioters enacted a refusal to adapt to the system responsible for the deprivation and incarceration of so many members of their communities.

¹¹⁸ The riots do not account for entirety or even most of the uprising. The uprising included protests and marches that did not involve the destruction of property. As part of the general sensationalizing of the uprising, the mainstream media failed to highlight these non-destructive actions of political protest (Aminata 2015).

Such a refusal to adjust to an injurious social system characterizes the ethical act, as it is theorized in radical forms of psychoanalysis. A defiant “No” is deeply embedded in the principles of Lacanian psychoanalysis, a practice that encourages a rejection of adjustment and adaptation.¹¹⁹ Turning to the work of Lacanians Alenka Zupančič and Yannis Stavrakakis, I will show how this bold anti-adaptive stance depends upon a willingness to encounter disruptions that free the self from social constraints that deaden its ability to thrive. The analytic encounter, as a situation meant to bring to the surface the unsettling and the disruptive, in an effort to shift the analysand away from accustomed modes of acting and thinking, guides my interpretation of the Baltimore rioters’ actions as productive of social change. In the conclusion to the following section, I draw a parallel between the autonomy-generating character of analysis—that it allows the analysand a degree of authorship over the terms of her existence—and the authorship taken by the rioters in their creation and dissemination of new self-created social scripts.

Psychoanalysis: A Practice of Discontent

In an interview with an Italian magazine in 1974, Lacan publicly decried the therapeutic trends he saw developing in American psychoanalytic circles. He warned of the dangers of conceiving of psychoanalysis as adaptive therapy, as a means to adjust the self to an imagined normal sociality, claiming that such practices were far from what Freud had

¹¹⁹ Philippe Van Haute’s *Against Adaptation: Lacan’s ‘Subversion of the Subject’* (2002) explores the anti-adaptive nature of Lacanian psychoanalysis in detail.

envisioned for the practice of psychoanalysis. Lacan told the interviewer, “After his [Freud’s] death in 1939, some of his students also claimed to be exercising a different kind of psychoanalysis by reducing his teachings to a few banal formulas: technique as a ritual, practice restricted to treating people’s behavior, as a means of re-adapting the individual to his social environment. This is the negation of Freud: a comforting salon psychoanalysis” (1974).¹²⁰ Such incarnations of the practice would serve only to dull the critical edge of psychoanalysis and thus its force as a practice aimed at cultivating resistance toward normative circumscription.

Lacan criticized American ego psychology’s focus on enriching the self’s capacity to adapt to its environment. Perhaps he had in mind analysts like Heinz Hartmann whose work outlines a therapeutic protocol for adjusting the self and the environment in unison, to achieve a greater harmony between the two (Hartmann 1964).¹²¹ In contrast, Lacan proclaimed that to become well-adjusted was a goal antithetical to the original intentions of Freudian psychoanalysis. In opposition to therapeutic practices that focus on an accommodating stance toward social norms, Lacan and his followers pursue a form of psychoanalysis based on a continual attentiveness to the aspects of social existence that the self consciously or unconsciously rebels against. This form of analysis highlights the ways

¹²⁰ George Makari gives a detailed account of psychoanalysis’s shift toward systemization, therapeutics, and medicalization. In this process, Freud’s belief that anyone could become an analyst was replaced by requirements of a medical degree and institutionalized training. This shift checked psychoanalysis’s previous incorporation of radicals, sexologists, teachers, and social scientists. As a consequence, psychoanalysis edged away from political and social critique, and the goal of treatment became more and more about correcting and adjusting the maladjusted to the norms of society (Makari 2008).

¹²¹ Lewis Aron and Karen Starr trace Hartmann’s emphasis on adaptation to the increasing importance of scientism, individualism, and autonomy (figured as objective judgment) in postwar 1950’s American society. The aim of ego-analysis was to help the ego “achieve autonomy, not only from the drives, but also from the environment; this double autonomy provided the ego with the capacity for adjustment and adaptation” (2013, 121).

in which attentiveness to lack and discord enables the amelioration of social-political injustice by encouraging actors to resist rather than adapt to harmful social structures.

Lacanian Alenka Zupančič adheres to a critical rather than adaptive form of psychoanalysis in her study of comedy as a potential practice of insurrection. Her depiction of comedy as endemic to the analytic situation—a site where one cultivates critical social awareness—helps explain how anti-adaptive forms of political protest can foster social change.¹²² Zupančič looks to Hegel’s section on Religion in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to discuss the shifts that comedy produces in the Other,¹²³ in the social practices and language of everyday life.

In his section on religion, Hegel turns his focus away from the point of view of self-consciousness and to the point of view of the Absolute (Zupančič 2008, 14). He shifts from his concern with self-consciousness—the self’s awareness that it exists as an entity that can reflect on and create change in the outside world (Hegel, 1977 § 166-67)—to a concern for how the world, described as the Absolute (the “absolute Spirit realized in the plurality of existent consciousnesses”) (Hegel, 1977 § 447) comes to recognize the role of selves in its creation. It is not enough for self-consciousness to *know* that the Absolute does not exist without it, to know that self-consciousness partakes and contributes to the world. The Absolute itself, the Other (the modes of being that express who we are in society), must also come to realize “that it does not exist (outside the concrete consciousness of people

¹²² In chapter two, I outline Zupančič’s theorization of comedy and love as related socially subversive modalities.

¹²³ I use the Lacanian term “Other” to designate the world of language and culture, as well as that which the subject comes to see as other to itself. This can be other people, as well as feelings, actions, desires, and thoughts that may emit from the self, but feel alien to it. This use of the term “Other,” slightly deviates from the typical Lacanian use of the term to designate the world of language/image. For a more nuanced and detailed discussion of Lacan’s term “Other,” see chapter two.

and of the world)” (Zupančič 2008, 16). The social self *and* the modes of being, understanding, and acting that are sanctioned by our social world must come to realize that they are mutually incomplete. Zupančič suggests that, starting from the self-consciousness of the Absolute, Hegel articulates a form of freedom dependent not upon individual consciousness and its fit with the Absolute, but on the mutual realization of their shared incompleteness.¹²⁴

This particular reading deepens Hegel’s better-known understanding of freedom as dependent upon the “concrete identity of the good with the subjective will” (Zupančič 2008, 152). For Hegel, such an identity necessitates the self’s robust participation in the ethical source from which its subjectivity springs. Free agency requires participation in the conditions that enable human freedom, that is, in the ethical community and eventually the state. This would mean self-consciousness has realized its role in the creation of the Absolute, in the world of the Other. In this reading of Hegelian freedom, the emphasis is on how self-consciousness sees the Absolute, on how self-consciousness sees its role in creating the conditions of its freedom.

Hegel suggests an alternative vision of freedom in his section on Religion. Here, Hegel turns to focus on how the Absolute (the configurations of social meaning that comprise the Absolute) comes to see itself as incomplete and contingent on the actions of self-consciousness. Zupančič introduces a Lacanian challenge to readings of the Hegelian self as free only in its realization of unity with its world. Rather than reading Hegel as

¹²⁴ Žižek ties Lacanian ethic’s insistence on the realization of mutual lack between self and other to Hegel’s notion of Absolute Knowledge. Rather than reading Absolute Knowledge as a realization of unity, Žižek stresses that this concept echoes the Lacanian realization of a void in the Other. He states, “the Hegelian ‘sublation of the Other’ does not equate either to a fusion of the subject with its Other, or to the appropriation, on the part of the subject, of any substantial content; it is rather a specifically Hegelian way of saying that ‘the Other does not exist’ (Lacan), in other words, that the Other does not exist as the Guarantor of Truth” (2005, 49).

suggesting that freedom requires harmonization between the self and its world, she finds in Hegel an assertion of the importance of the mutual lack in both entities, their sense of alienation from each other but also their absolute dependence upon one another. It is consciousness of mutual lack and alienation rather than an idealization of harmony that facilitates free action.

This crucial alienation, or ill fit, the defining element of the Lacanian subject-world relation, generates *movement*. For Hegel, this dynamism is dialectical movement, and for Lacan, it is the force of desire that engenders a shift in the Other. “This is why,” Zupančič claims, “for both Hegel and Lacan, the real point at which something in this relationship can be effectively shifted is not the abolition of Otherness, or its absorption into the subject, but the coincidence of the lack in the subject with the lack in the Other” (2008, 17). The shift comes from the “encounter of the two entities at a very precise (or precisely right) point of their topology. This is a short circuit of internal and external, not an elimination of the one or the other” (Zupančič 2008, 17). Rather than the realization of harmony between the self and the world, it is the zeroing in on their mutual deficiency that generates a shift in the social matrix. The basis of social change lies in the fractious nature of the self-world relationship.

Yannis Stavrakakis’s study of the political implications of Lacan’s theories clarifies how this productive point of contact arises. He explains that the parallel lack in the subject and the lack in the social exist due to the realities of signification. Because language ultimately fails to depict uniqueness, given that it can only exist at a communicable level of abstraction, social significations always fall short of portraying, with exact precision, what they seek to represent. In this sense, the world of social meaning expresses a lack in

extensiveness akin to the lack in the desiring subject.¹²⁵ While the subject might seek to identify with a collective signification, “the lack on the objective level means that every such identification is only reproducing the lack in the subject,” objective meanings “being incapable of providing the lost real fullness of the individual subject” (Stavrakakis 1999, 41). Yet, rather than ensuring only a deficient existence, the lacking nature of both the social-self and the social-collective actually allows the subject a degree of freedom. As Žižek notes, “without this lack in the Other, the Other would be a closed structure and the only possibility open to the subject would be his radical alienation in the Other” (1989, 137). However, because this lack *does* exist, the social is an open system capable of transformation.

This crucial space of interlocking lack endows the subject with the ability to transform signification at the social and subjective level, to ethically rewrite the terms of social-selfhood. This space of lack, as I have previously suggested, allows the subject to potentially inhabit an ethical comportment of autonomy—a comportment attentive to the inconsistencies in social narratives that encourages the dismissal or revision of such social scripts. As Zupančič suggests, “a certain inconsistency or incompleteness of the Other (moral law) is the very kernel of ethics” (2000, 147). It is precisely by identifying with this lack in the Other that the subject acquires “a breathing space” which “enables him to avoid total alienation in the signifier” (Žižek 1989, 137). Alienation remains open to partial

¹²⁵ For Lacan, desire drives our existence. Desire manifests as lack introduced by language, which propels being in its incessant search for satisfaction. Formed in the gap between needs and the articulation of these needs, the demands one addresses to the other, desire emerges from the very otherness of language. Because language comes to the self as Other, the demands one makes always introduce a disjoint between what they intend and what they say. Desire lives in this disjoint, as a longing for a satisfaction consistent with what is inexpressible in language. In this sense, the living subject exists as a lacking being (Lacan 1992, 294). I explain Lacan’s concept of the lacking subject in greater detail in chapter two.

amelioration through shifts in the social-self relationship. Awareness and identification with this “breathing space” thus becomes crucial for the embodiment of an ethical comportment generative of radical social change. Identifying with the lack in the social, staying with the feeling that the social “hasn’t got it, hasn’t got the final answer” (Žižek 1989, 137), allows the subject to remain open to its incompleteness, rather than incessantly searching for ways to disavow its lack by participating in social fantasies of self-sovereignty, mastery, and harmony, fantasies that quite often require the violent expulsion of otherness.¹²⁶ Less inclined to overlook the hypocrisies and inconsistencies of social norms, the self identified with lack begins to see these norms as fantasies, as attempts to deflect otherness and loss.

This critical awareness frees the self from much of the force of these fantasies and enables it to inhabit a comportment of autonomy, a comportment divergent from modes of “normalcy” and productive of new modes of being. As I will show, some participants of the Baltimore riots expressed just such a critical awareness of the fantastic nature of normative American ideals, such as “legitimate” state violence, racial equality, and economic meritocracy, as well as a parallel unwillingness to carry on in faithfulness to these ideals.

Zupančič suggests that certain practices of psychoanalysis inspire such critical mindfulness by encouraging subjects to embrace their shared lack with the social and to defer tendencies to adjust the self to fit within a perceived “normal.” Disposed to challenge

¹²⁶ Žižek notes that “fantasy is precisely an attempt to fill out this lack in the Other, i.e. to reconstitute the consistency of the big Other” (2005, 333). Here, he has in mind paranoid fantasies that seek to revivify the authority of the big Other by situating an agency beyond the Other that could account for disruptions to our normal social order. Such paranoid fantasies are meant to protect the social order from receiving the blame for its own hypocrisies and inconsistencies. For example, Žižek states, we might imagine that “beneath the chaos of the market, the degradation of morals, etc. there is the purposeful strategy of say, the Jewish Plot—or, today, more fashionably, the Templars plot” (2005, 333).

the notion of arelational selfhood, psychoanalysis encourages change in both self and Other (the Absolute) at the point of their overlapping incompleteness. In psychoanalysis, it is not enough for the patient to come to know how her unconscious determines her actions and to attempt “to change herself and her perception of the world” (Zupančič 2008, 17). Rather, the main goal of analysis is to incite a change in both subject and world, “to shift and change the very symbolic and imaginary structures in which this unconscious is embodied outside of herself, in the manner and rituals of her conduct, speech, relations to others...” (Zupančič 2008, 16). Psychoanalysis encourages a change in the material conditions of the subject by means of “shifting external practices” (Zupančič 2008, 16) through their repetition.

In analysis, the patient repeatedly recounts her actions and all the things she perceives as “happening to her.” The analyst’s role is not to point out that she is in fact unconsciously responsible for these occurrences, but rather to allow her to encounter these incidents again and again. As the subject recalls the experiences of her social identity “functioning outside in the Other” (Zupančič 2008, 18), these experiences begin to shift in meaning. In their repetition, they begin to seem more alien and less integral to the patient’s selfhood as they accrue layers of meaning that diverge from the patient’s original experiences. As Deleuze notes, repetition entails a positive production of difference, and indeed, the analysand perceives an excess, a difference, in these events over time (Zupančič 2008, 176).¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Stephen Mitchell also finds this dynamic central to clinical psychoanalysis. He states “the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis is the emergence of something new from something old” (Mitchell 2014, 59).

Zupančič explains the significance of this production of symbolic excess by looking to the ways in which comedy weakens the authority of Master-Signifiers through their repetition. Žižek defines the Lacanian term “Master-Signifier” as an “empty signifier of symbolic authority” (2005, 290).¹²⁸ An example would be the notion of “democracy” or “equality.” Both exist as ideals that we tend to accept uncritically, despite their diversity in meaning and practice. They stand on the authority they evoke in themselves, rather than on their fit with social reality. They serve to tie together dissimilar and often contradictory meanings; yet, we rarely interrogate the inconsistency these terms suppress. Even if such inconsistencies are recognized and understood as richness in meaning, the significance and hallowedness of such concepts remains largely uncontested. These signifiers are taken as emblematic of universal truths. Master-Signifiers operate to hold together our fantasies of social identity and cover over the arbitrary nature of their authority to determine our actions, thoughts, and beliefs.

Comedy displays Master-Signifiers as self-evident truths in a manner that ironically broadcasts their insincerities. In comedy, “Master-Signifiers enter the scene...not to have the last word, but in order to be repeated there” (Zupančič 2008, 177), to have their inconsistencies exposed. An example of a comedic and subversive repetition of Master-Signifiers would be comedian Stephen Colbert’s repeated displays of intense American patriotism on the show *The Colbert Report*. This repetition is comedic precisely because it threatens the stability of “America” as a Master-Signifier. Comedic repetition, like the

¹²⁸ For more on Lacan’s explanation of the term “master-signifier,” see: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1981) and *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (2007).

repetition that occurs in the course of analysis, produces a surprise as it reveals the ridiculous, and somewhat empty and arbitrary character of Master-Signifiers.

Both comedy and psychoanalysis can operate to lessen the hold that Master-Signifiers have over us by pushing these structural points until they reveal the inconsistencies and excesses that our systems of thought inherently generate and then seek to disavow. Mindful of the shifty and somewhat arbitrary nature of signification, we are less inclined to adhere so forcefully to social identities and socially accepted ways of being. Never entirely in a position of mastery over the terms of her selfhood, the self begins to realize that the world never truly masters her.

The practice of analysis aims to allow the analysand a perspective from which to sense the presence of detrimental social fantasies through the repetition of failed enactments of their promises. Analysis exposes the inadequacies of common beliefs—that they might not serve the analysand—and overtime, through their repetition, shows that such beliefs might be highly inconsistent with the way the analysand would like to be. In this sense, analysis operates as a practice allied with a comportment of receptive autonomy. Both analysis and receptive autonomy compel an openness to disruptions to normative ways of being as a means to shift the ways both the self and the social operate. Both psychoanalysis and receptive autonomy aim to enhance our ability to write our own social self-law by encouraging a refusal of the laws provided and by stimulating an awareness that things could be otherwise than how they stand.

Our nomos, the field of meaning that determines what we deem desirable or even possible, shifts through the production of counternarratives. As legal scholar Robert Cover suggests, “the codes that relate our normative system to our social constructions of reality

and to our visions of what the world might be are narrative” (1983, 10). We write our laws, our nomos, or narratives, through creative dissidence, “by using the irony of jurisdiction, the comedy of manners that is *malum prohibitum*, the surreal epistemology of due process” (Cover 1983, 8-9). Just as analysis and comedy align with a comportment of receptive autonomy, in that they aim to produce critical awareness and stimulate the creation of new modes of being, so too can playing with the inconsistencies and hypocrisies of revered beliefs and legal precedents serve as a means to autonomously rewrite the terms of one’s existence.

Dissent in Baltimore

Similar to the ways in which psychoanalysis reveals the potentially detrimental qualities of deeply held beliefs and these beliefs’ basis in social fantasies, so too do the everyday lives of many West Baltimoreans expose the emptiness of the fantasy of the American Dream. The rioters, in a practice analogous to the analytic repetition of social fantasies—a repetition that over time reveals these fantasies’ inadequacies and inconsistencies—revealed the pretense of prevailing American principles by living these principles, by acting as if such principles might be sincere, as if these principles might apply to their own lives. The rioters *perversely conformed* to entrenched American ideals, exposing these ideals as insincere and as dependent upon the impoverishment, dispossession, and incarceration of Black Americans.

The riots of April 2015 occurred in a context of police brutality and systemic dispossession (Friedersdorf 2015). They signaled a refusal on the part of West

Baltimoreans to adjust to police violence, mass-incarceration, and racist regulatory policies—all manifestations of a system that works to maintain a high quality of life for white Americans (Coates 2014). The mainstream media, mostly discounting the context of the riots, portrayed them as everything from acts of destruction, slightly justified but overzealous actions of protest, to actions ruinous to the cause of ending police violence against Black Americans. Every mainstream news source highlighted the property destruction involved and the allegedly self-destructive nature of the rioters' actions (Abdul-Jabbar 2015; Lewis 2015; Myers 2015; Gorman 2015). Various left-leaning news sources attempted to put the riots into context, exploring the conditions that gave rise to the uprising—police violence and the inaction of courts to prosecute officers in cases involving the shooting of Black citizens (Patterson 2015; Short 2015; Gude 2015; Johnston 2015). Yet, the overwhelming response from the media was to report endlessly on the fires and looting that took place during the riots. The news coverage wildly emphasized the shocking and allegedly imprudent nature of the events, but failed to note the *everyday situations* that gave rise to the riots.

The paradigm represented in the media narratives that portrayed the riots as gratuitous betrays the deep-rooted denial of systemic violence that perpetuates systems of racial dispossession in American cities. Baltimore born writers Ta-Nehisi Coates and D. Watkins describe how the brutality of everyday life in East and West Baltimore exists as a byproduct of the social continuation and obscuration of white privilege. Constantly harassed by police, deprived of adequate schools, grocery stores, and community resources, many Baltimoreans struggle on a daily basis just to survive (Watkins 2015). Turning to Christopher Doob's theory of "social reproduction," Watkins contends that poor

conditions in parts of Baltimore exist as a consequence of a system *meant to* sustain a high quality of life for the privileged at the expense of poor Black Baltimoreans (Watkins 2015). Watkins explains that theory of social reproduction “holds that we’ve got to produce a certain number of minimum-wage workers and inmates—a general collection of bottom-feeders—for capitalism to sustain, and so we build the social structures to keep that level of misery going” (54, 2015). The accumulation of white wealth, built into the very basis of contemporary American life, requires the continued appropriation of Black labor and the impoverishment and incarceration of Black Americans.

Those involved in the protests and in the riots referred to these injustices as the root cause of the rioting. Many protesters who did not take part in the riots nevertheless saw the rioting as a justified response to systemic injustice. Tanay Thrower, one of the citizens helping to clean up after the rioting, described the riots as an expression of peoples’ frustration over the neglect of their communities. Thrower cites lack, “the lack of health resources, the lack of mental health resources, the lack of a education system, the lack of being able to have support...” (Maté 2015), as the endemic cause of the unrest.

Coates describes how a continuous turning away from this system of racial injustice and the privation it perpetuates keeps the dream of white self-sovereignty alive. The adherents of the dream “must not just believe in it but believe that it is just, believe that their possession of the Dream is the natural result of grit, honor, and good works” (Coates 2015a, 98). Coates recounts how this process of turning away is embedded in the American way of life, stating, “the mettle that it takes to look away from the horror of our prison system, from police forces transformed into armies, from the long war against the Black body, is not forged overnight. This is the practiced habit of jabbing out one’s own eyes and

forgetting the work of one's hands" (Coates 2015a, 98). The dream of white self-sufficiency and justified entitlement, a dream that is inseparable from the American Dream, is sustained by practices of habitual forgetting. Steve Martinot and Jared Sexton characterize this repetitive forgetting as:

...the passive apparatus of whiteness...that actively forgets that it owes its existence to the killing and terrorizing of those it racializes...expelling them from the human fold in the same gesture of forgetting. It is the passivity of bad faith that tacitly accepts as "what goes without saying" the postulates of white supremacy. And it must do so passionately since "what goes without saying" is empty and can be held as a "truth" only through an obsessiveness (2003, 179).

This obsessive forgetting forms the psychic veil that keeps white Baltimoreans comfortably "unaware" of the conditions of neighborhoods in East and West Baltimore. Predictably, from this amnesic viewpoint, a viewpoint rarely aware of its own status as a particular position, the rioting in Baltimore appeared as an unwarranted outbreak of property destruction.

However, the rioters and protesters refused to consent to the mainstream depiction of the riots as unjustified and apolitical. The rioters indirectly countered the media narratives of their actions by *acting out* the ideals of mainstream America to expose their insincerities, and protesters and rioters directly countered these depictions by producing their own narratives of the uprising. The rioters' actions revealed the inconsistencies behind such Empty-Signifiers as "violence" and "looting" and "non-violence" and "ownership." Reports on the violence and looting that occurred during the riots began to sound rather insincere when accompanied by counternarratives that exposed systemic police-violence and the realities of a consumer-culture predicated on impoverishment.

By acting as if the promises of American citizenship, as if principles of meritocracy and respect for bodily integrity, actually applied to their own lives rioters revealed the

hypocrisy of these supposedly universal rights. They uprooted the notion that white privilege has nothing to do with Black dispossession, that violence in Black communities stems from internal issues, and that the strength of one's work ethic determines one's access to material sustenance. In perversely *repeating* normative patterns of consumer culture and assuming the right to bodily integrity, rioters exposed the emptiness of these ideals.

I read the rioters' looting as a form of practical (not necessarily intentional) social protest. These acts of taking perversely realize the rules of consumer culture. Work, according to a capitalist ethic, should be remunerated. When work is not close to adequately waged or does not even exist, only the second command of consumer capitalism can be followed. Consume. The rioters, in taking what society had promised in exchange for labor, disclosed the insincerity of the ideal of the self-made man. Disrupting the rules of consumption by following them, the rioters exposed the falsity of the idea of equal access. They agreed to live by the ideal of equal access through the only means accessible to them, in the process uncovering the hollowness of any guarantee of equality through market forces.

The rioters' destruction of property brought to light the sickness of a society that refuses to differentiate between the destruction of property and the destruction of life. While mainstream news sources continued to label the damaging of property "violence," the idea that property damage should be equated with violence began to sound less convincing when joined by stories about the everyday violence experienced by Black Americans at the hands of police and the violence of neglect and appropriation experienced at the hands of more affluent members of society. Miriam, a Baltimorean involved in the

post-riot cleanup, grappled with the cruel logic of valuing property over life. She stated, “yes, property is damaged, but that’s—I feel like you can replace property. You can’t replace a life” (Maté 2015). Versions of this message spread, through social media, during and after the riots. Perhaps, even people previously uncritical of the equation of property damage with violence have begun to question the language of violence used to describe the riots, to puzzle over this equation of human life with property. In damaging property, rioters revealed the troubling hierarchy of American values—the priority of protection for property over the viability of Black lives.

In perversely acting in accordance with American ideals, the norms of wealth accumulation and consumption, as well as the expectation of freedom from bodily harm, the rioters made visible to others what they likely knew through experience. The American promise of equal rights, fairly compensated work, and respect for bodily integrity, life, and liberty lives only as a fantasy, supporting a system that operates to sustain great inequalities of social nourishment. The ideal of the self-made man, the individual shorn of all dependency, hides a system in which the dispossession of those deemed “other” sustains an illusion of self-sovereignty for the privileged few who are, in fact, quite *dependent* on their capacity to exploit. In attending to and prying open the crack in these fantasies, the incoherence between this social promise and their own reality, the rioters produced an excess, an unintelligible demand that society would be forced to attempt to decipher. In this manner, their actions, their enactment of discontent, stimulated a *change* in the Other.

The rioters shifted the social narrative surrounding their communities by replaying American ideals from their own position. They played back to mainstream America what the idealization of property and wealth and a lack of concern for Black lives truly looks

likes from the streets of West Baltimore. As one man involved in the cleanup stated about the positive effects of the riots, “now we have their attention. Now there’s a state of emergency...if this has to happen for them to get a clue, then it has to happen” (Maté 2015).

“Acting out”¹²⁹ the fantasy of the American Dream from the streets of Baltimore, the rioters exposed the nightmarish underside of this fantasy, its basis in systemic racial injustice. The rioters proceeded to challenge the sanctity of the Dream, through a perverse repetition of this Dream, forcing a change in many Americans’ perception of racial injustice. As in analysis, the rioters’ repetition of failed fantastic investments revealed the inadequacies of many ideals to which American society has become attached and lessened the force of these ideals’ hold over the American imaginary. The rioters worked to shift the conditions of their own lives as subjects invested in and contributing to a social imaginary. It is precisely this ability to recreate one’s own landscape of meaning through an attentiveness to and deployment of disruption that characterizes a comportment of receptive autonomy.

This affirmation of dissent as a means of social critique and social change, insisted upon by some Lacanians and embodied in the actions of the protesters, follows directly from Freud’s own conclusions regarding social-political life. Freud recognized that widespread *discontent*, rather than being a rare or absolutely undesirable condition, formed the very basis of modern society. He most famously claimed that civilization itself emerged through a process of growing discontent and resulting compensatory measures. He found that through various psychic mechanisms, the sublimation of libido, the

¹²⁹ The psychoanalytic concept of “acting out” means to perform an action, usually considered self-destructive or anti-social, as a way to express (often unconsciously) frustration with a past or present relational dynamic (Freud 1914). Lacan describes acting out as a means of indirect communication with the Other (Lacan 2014, 123-4).

establishment of aim-inhibited erotic bonds, and the repression of natural aggressive inclinations, civilization grew both more magnificent and more oppressive (Freud 2010). Freud never suggested that the movement generated in discontent would be inherently progressive or desirable. Even the seemingly benevolent “commandment to love one’s neighbor” (2010, 145), could in time, Freud warned, put too much strain on a humankind’s natural aggressive tendencies. While Freud recognized the value of the moral commands of society, he always insisted upon their alienating character and the resulting necessity for their revision. Freud recognized the beneficial power of discontent, of remaining abnormal or ill adjusted in a society replete with detrimental and destructive moralities.

This emphasis on discontent, on remaining restless with respect to a damaging environment, produces a productive dissonance that can manifest as an impetus for social change. An ethical comportment of autonomy, made possible by remaining receptive to feelings of alienation discernible in the self’s relation to normative existence, encourages the rejection of social mores and the creation of new ways of being.¹³⁰ This readiness to reject the given normative order and a parallel willingness to demand something more has incited and sustained countless movements against racist, gendered, and heteronormative systems of injustice.

¹³⁰ My assertion concerning the necessary affirmation of disharmony echoes Ernst Bloch’s notion of hope. Bloch suggests that hope, by nature, does not make peace with the existing world and thus it is always disappointed. The fact that hope never rests and never finds peace affirms its value (Bloch 1998).

Creative Maladjustment

Martin Luther King Jr.'s notion of "creative maladjustment" helps develop my theory of receptive autonomy as an anti-adaptive creative comportment inspired by an awareness of hypocrisy. In his 1967 address to the American Psychological Association, King called upon the creative power of the "maladjusted" to challenge racist systems of injustice that had been established by white society. In his speech, he acknowledged the importance of the social sciences to the Civil Rights Movement as a means to interrogate the ways Black lives could be bettered, but criticized the adaptively focused analysis proffered by psychologists as a way of pathologizing Black people in their actions of protest.

Insisting on the reasonable and practical nature of such actions of dissent, given the context of their emergence, King claimed that riots, specifically, rather than acts of *random* violence, were *intended* "to shock the white community" (1967, 1). He stated that in these actions, the Black American, "knowing that this society cherishes property above people...is shocking it by abusing property rights" (King 1967, 1). While calling these shocking actions crimes, yet only in so much as "they are born of the greater crimes of white society" (1967, 1), King also alluded to their productive character, how such actions called attention to the plight of Black Americans.

King's notion of "shock" resonates with the Lacanian claim that analytic encounters produce a startling excess that facilitates the self's rejection and reevaluation of dominant social patterns. Such a notion of shock retains immense value for our own era's resistances to racial injustice. The Baltimore riots produced a shock to illusions of white self-

sovereignty that stand upon the dispossession of Black Americans. It was precisely the disruption of business as usual in Baltimore that revealed the fictitious nature of white society's claim to self-determination. The actions of the rioters, broadcasted across the world in the days following Gray's death, revealed the justified anger and pain of many citizens in West Baltimore, who have suffered for generations under racist systems of injustice. While the disruptive force of this shock, its ability to greatly shift a societal approach toward racial injustice, has yet to be determined, the socially acceptable disavowal of such systems of injustice has surely been irreparably jeopardized (Taylor 2016).

Kathleen Stewart discerns how events that disrupt, shock, or unsettle, but do not necessarily overthrow normative social codes, still perform the important work of lessening these social codes' hold over our collective imagination. Stewart describes how acts of effective political resistance need not display a goal-oriented or intentional character nor act to overturn a symbolic universe in one go. Rather, such resistances work incrementally to unsettle and unseat the American Dream, to exposed its malevolent underside. She states:

Imagine "resistance" not as a thing of clear consciousness and purposive, instrumental agency but as something more diffuse and pervasive and fundamental. Picture it as that pregnant and potentially portentous moment of chafing. It registers a haunting; it approaches what Lacan calls the Real, or that which resists assimilation to the symbolic order (such as the American Dream). It interrupts the dream.... It may disappear literally "before you know it" but remain an affecting presence left in traces and symptoms. Like a blot on the lens of a camera, it may become an irritant that lodges itself in the matter of things. In the nervous dance of cultural politics, the Real embeds itself in forms of pleasure and pain; it leaves structures of feeling in its wake—at once palpable and elusive (Stewart 2000, 251).

The enactment of discontent, as seen in the riots, forced a dissemination of contingency throughout Baltimore, a tremor that has unsettled the city and possibly the American imaginary—its complacent heedlessness of racial injustice and its faith in the good health of its ideals. The rioters and protesters, the dissidents and the “maladjusted,” have acted to reveal the ill-health, the malignance, of the social world in which they exist.

In the conclusion of his address, King affirmed the power of a “pathological” refusal to adjust to a racist society, designating this refusal “creative maladjustment” (1967, 3). Wielding their own term “maladjusted” against those psychologists who would use it to malign the character and actions of the Black community, King insisted on the beneficent nature of remaining at odds with a society intent on the exploitation of its Black population. He expressed his intention to challenge the norm of adjustment, stating to his largely white audience:

There are some things concerning which we must always be maladjusted if we are to be people of good will. We must never adjust ourselves to racial discrimination and racial segregation. We must never adjust ourselves to religious bigotry. We must never adjust ourselves to economic conditions that take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few. We must never adjust ourselves to the madness of militarism, and the self-defeating effects of physical violence (King 1967, 3).

The recent uprising in Baltimore expresses this mode of creative maladjustment. The rioters and protesters refused to adapt to the damaging laws of a racist society and the stories such a society told about their lives. The riots, which were a point of focus for global news media for weeks, produced a simmering awareness that despite American’s willingness to declare the end of race and racism, such a declaration of equality achieved and injustice rectified remained an anathema to the majority of Black citizens in

Baltimore.¹³¹ A key component of white privilege—the denial of dependence upon the impoverishment and incarceration of Black Americans—had been exposed in a profound way. By challenging the integrity of the American Dream, by revealing its inconsistencies and hypocrisies, and in shifting the discourse surrounding their communities, participants in the uprising lived a comportment of receptive autonomy; they created space for a new Dream, a new nomos, a new set of self-created social laws.

The Impossible

The Baltimore riots express a disruptive creativity characteristic of a comportment of receptive autonomy, a comportment that aligns with several tenants of Lacan's notion of ethics. As I explain in chapter one, rupture is central to Lacan's understanding of ethics. For Lacan, the ethical act necessarily unsettles standard social discourse and creates a space for the unknown and the impossible. Lacan contends that the ethical break with the given, as it occurs in analysis, "opens a path" and leaves us "at the threshold" (1992, 21).

Psychoanalysis proscribes no cure or palliative, but offers the *possibility* of transformation by revealing the presence of social scripts and habits that influence our ways of being.

Ethical acts merely break open an established social horizon, creating space for something unforeseen and unimaginable. This unpredictability of the ethical act attests to the danger of the act—that the actor refuses to promise some good end or aim. This volatility, however, is precisely what marks the act as autonomous, as free from the

¹³¹ Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor notes that, despite the current terror and violence faced by Black communities at the hands of the state and mainstream society, "the United States is often referred to these days as a 'colorblind' or 'postracial' society" (2016, 4).

constraints of the conceivable. Describing the anti-adaptive and creative character of Lacan's notion of ethics, Paul Allen Miller states that, in uprooting the bounds of the possible, ethical acts express "an ethics of creation as opposed to conformity" (2007a, 1). Frantz Fanon describes his struggle to usher in a new world for Black humanity in similar terms. Fanon expresses his willingness to "risk annihilation so that two or three truths can cast their essential light on the world," truths that would affirm the humanity of "the black man" (1967, 202). Conveying the inventive and ardent nature his revelatory struggle, Fanon asserts "I am not a prisoner of History. I must not look for the meaning of my destiny in that direction. I must constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists of introducing invention into life. In the world I am heading for, I am endlessly creating myself" (Fanon 1967, 204). Fanon expresses an ethos of struggle, a mode of obdurate and creative rebellion, redolent of the spirit of Lacanian ethics. In the interest of continual self/world creation, the ethical act disregards the possible and instantiates a space for the impossible.

The Baltimore rioters acted ethically in refusing to play along with the narrative that committing to hard work and abiding by the values of independence and self-determination would ensure them an equal place in American society. In rejecting this fiction and declining to act only through "respectable" (normatively sanctioned) political channels (voting, policy reformation, etc.), rioters turned away from the politically possible,¹³² disentangling themselves from social laws they had little to no part in writing. The rioters' actions opened a space of potentiality, a space for a new way of conceiving of and realizing social change.

¹³² Lester Spence notes that "Baltimore citizens have been organizing for decades for better police policies at the local and state level, for more resources to combat poverty and against drug-related violence—with their pleas falling on deaf ears, their policy proposals consistently ignored by political officials" (2015).

This space of potentiality, as psychoanalysis cautions, may not always lead to an improvement in peoples' lives. Baltimore has a long history of riots instigated by racial injustice, including an uprising in 1968 that broke out in response to King's assassination only months after his address to the A.P.A. (Lewis 2015). I contend that the riots of 1968 and the riots of 2015 express a common refusal to adjust to an unjust society. However, I am not suggesting that these riots lack historical particularity, that they or their respective consequences can be easily equated with one another. In fact, some historians suggest that the riots of 1968 had a mostly negative effect on the lives of Black Baltimoreans, because they contributed to mainstream American fears about inner-city crime that bolstered the rise of the New Right (Elfenbein et al. 2011). This is not to imply that the 1968 riots did not have an important and galvanizing symbolic effect for the fight against anti-Black racism. However, the uncertain legacy of 1968 does point to the unknowable quality of the outcomes of disruptive actions of refusal. The fact that such actions guarantee no certain end or outcome is the basis of both their visionary and dangerous nature.

Lacanian psychoanalysis's understanding of the analytic encounter and King's notion of "creative maladjustment" capture the significance of the West Baltimore uprising as a momentary instantiation of an ethics of refusal. Negation and dissent form the central ethical factor in both accounts. Yet, the creative element of the rioters' actions cannot be adequately explained by a theory primarily appreciative of dissent and anti-adaptation. While King alludes to "creativity," his notion of "creative maladjustment" remains open for further development. Lacanian ethics edges closer to an understanding of the potentially productive outcomes of dissent by attending to the self-disruptive nature of ethical action, to the fact that ethical acts break with what is and create space for *something unforeseen*.

However, as the aftermath of the riots shows, neither King's notion of creative maladjustment, as a posture of refusal, nor Lacanian ethic's emphasis on disruption, can satisfactorily account for the forceful *counternarratives* produced by the rioters. The rioters and protesters did not just disrupt standard social narratives; they wrote new ones.

The rioters and protesters provided counternarratives to the media's accounts of their struggles and of life in their communities. As Cover explains, the creation and dissemination of counternarratives, the creation of a new world of meaning, expresses autonomy. He states "when groups generate their own articulate normative orders concerning the world as they transform it, as well as the mode of transformation and their own place within the world...a new *nomos*, with its attendant claims to autonomy and respect, is created" (Cover 1983, 34). By rejecting given social laws and creating new laws, protesters and rioters began to write a new world into existence.

Rioters declined to merely choose from a selection of socially acceptable ways to grieve, express anger, and engage in political protest. Many refused the very terms of such a negotiation, and instead contributed to the creation of original modes of political action. Through the use of social media, through Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, Baltimoreans contradicted the media's depiction of the riots as self-destructive and violent and acted to raise awareness about police violence against Black Americans.

In blog-based interviews, several participants in the riots and in the broader uprising expressed views significantly contrary to mainstream media accounts. One man joked about the idea of looting toilet paper: "I saw my people out here gettin' toilet paper. Toilet Paper. Because they need toilet paper to wipe their ass, to wipe their kid's ass. You gon' send em to jail over toilet paper?" (Hazzard 2015). He spoke of the context of the

looting, its roots in economic deprivation, presenting a counter to the media's construal of the looting as opportunistic and unwarranted and the rioters as uneducated and naïve. As journalist Dominique Hazzard points out, the notion that the riots were self-destructive seemed completely out of place as well. She recalls, "Folks straight up told me, 'we don't own anything here,' and it was crystal clear to me that the communities had already been destroyed by poverty, by exploitation, by structural racism long before any riots connected to the murder of Freddie Gray" (2015). In addition to the impressions given in these interviews during the uprising, numerous participants expressed similar views in a collection of tweets published following the riots.

The zine, *The 2015 Baltimore Uprising: A Teen Epistolary*, contains a compilation of tweets from Baltimore teenagers during the days following the revelation of Freddie Gray's death. The thoughts expressed in the anthology differ in their assessments of the reasons for and the implications of Gray's death and the ensuing uprising, but many emphasize the political importance and self-affirmative nature of the looting and rioting. Writing in opposition to the portrayal of the riots as "embarrassing" or counterproductive for the Black community, many declared the need for what they variously referred to as "the uprising," "the purge," or "the riot." One woman writes, "let them ppl protest how they please, fuck being embarrassing, it's about getting the point across #NoJusticeNoPeace," another "For 2 weeks we have held peaceful protest still no answers! remember that." The news media's portrayal of the rioters' actions as frightening or unwarranted was countered by statements like "Being an African American in America is scary!" and "If you from Baltimore you know the city been a Volcano waiting to erupt for a while now." In response to accusations that the riot was ruining the city: "RUIN Baltimore??? Bitch have you SEEN

the city?????” In addition to offering a correction to the media’s misleading coverage of the events and their significance, the compilation of tweets shows that citizens used Twitter to share news, express political opinions, and check in on one another during the riots.

The role of social media in the rioters’ creation of novel forms of political engagement extends to their advancement of the movement Black Lives Matter. This political movement was created following the acquittal of the neighborhood watch coordinator responsible for the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager. The founders of Black Lives Matter, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, describe the movement as “an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression” (*#BlackLivesMatter* 2015). While the movement began with the widespread use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media, it has expanded to include rallies, teach-ins, protests, and actions to raise awareness and fight against anti-Black racism. The creators of Black Lives Matter publicly expressed their support for the uprising in Baltimore, and the riots themselves brought the movement more public exposure and likely more supporters (Workneh 2015).

The Baltimore protesters and rioters’ political use of social media during and after the riots, attests to the creative possibilities that ethical acts of refusal can engender. In this framing, one perceives how the rioters inhabited a comportment of receptive autonomy; they acted to reject rather than adapt to the bounds of the given while instantiating a new form of political participation. Through the reframing of their actions and the dissemination of the reality of the conditions in West Baltimore, the rioters interrupted the

societal quietude around issues of structural racism. They rewrote the terms of their existence.

The situation in Baltimore testifies to the political and ethical worth of questioning normative depictions of the pathological and of considering actors deemed maladjusted as symptomatic of a *pathological social system*.^{133, 134} As Lacanian ethics suggests, such actors might indeed be ethically deviating from the norms of an ailing society in the interest of transforming the very conditions of their lives within it. This view of social change upends a therapeutic personal approach to social transformation, an approach that hails from the same traditions as the American ego psychology that Lacan decried as conservative and conformist. Such an adaptively focused view, often expressed in a “get a job” ethos or in a cultural celebration of self-improvement, places the onus for social change on the backs of individuals, while insisting upon the *potential* harmony between the self and its social world.

As Lauren Berlant explains, this ideal of self-improvement (improving one’s suitability for one’s social environment) follows from liberal presuppositions. Self-help culture aligns with “liberal political culture,” which “posits individual autonomy and self-development at the center of value in social life” (Berlant 2012, 109). Self-help societies “implicitly suggest that structures and institutions of power can always be overcome by personal feelings, personal choices” (Berlant 2012, 108). Berlant contends that such

¹³³ The famous “Moynihan Report” (1965), which attributed Black poverty to a “tangle of pathology” based in the matriarchal structure of some black families, expresses the common understanding of pathology as a “maladaptive” response to given social conditions. In contrast, the notion of pathology I derive from King and Lacan suggests that the maladapted might be responding in a productive way to morbid social conditions.

¹³⁴ N.D.B Connolly highlights the fact that pathologizing explanations of Black poverty align with racialized explanations of social unrest. He discusses this directly in reference to the Baltimore uprising (Connolly 2015).

societies seek to overcome difference by appealing to a sameness of feeling. She explains that “Romantic ideology participates in this project by depicting sentiment or feeling as the essential and universal truth of persons. Feeling is what people have in common despite their apparent differences” (Berlant 2012, 110). This same culture, as Martinot and Sexton claim, sees individual “improvement” as the means to end racial injustice. They note that a “liberal ethos looks at racism as ignorance, something characteristic of the individual that can be solved at a social level through education and democratic procedure” (Martinot and Sexton 2003, 178). An idealization of democratically reached consensus matched with individual responsibility results in a strategy of social adaptation and adjustment. Accordingly, appeals to individual reform and compromise across difference tend to result in only miniscule and compensatory modifications to systems of injustice.

The power of maladjustment to evoke change attests to psychoanalysis’s claim that adaptation and the pursuit of social consensus and harmony, rather than being the grounds for ethical life, bar the actualization of ethical comportment. As Lacan and Lacanians suggest, ethics entails *forcing* a change in the Other, at the points where the self feels most estranged from its world. Copjec suggests that ethics means breaking with the collectively intelligible to such a degree that the community is shaken and possibly destroyed. Referring to Antigone’s ethical act of burying her enemy-of-the state brother, Copjec explains how an approach of compromise and accommodation is the antithesis of psychoanalytic ethics. She states, “it will not be for Lacan a matter of setting another place at the table, of making room for the one brother who was formerly excluded from the community, but of destroying the community in the name of what is impossible in it” (Copjec 2002, 41). In this sense, ethics requires the destruction of what is, in the interest of

the socially impossible. The Baltimore dissidents declined to accept a compensatory seat at the symbolic table of public policy formulation (as if this was ever even guaranteed to them), and instead acted to destroy the integrity of the ideological supports upon which this institutional form of politics rests. The rioters' actions demonstrate the potential for an ethics of refusal, disruption, and destruction, over an ethics of adaptation and accommodation to facilitate radical social change. Yet, the force required to produce such a societal shift necessarily disrupts, often violently, the lives of those engaged in social upheaval.

The mainstream media narrative certainly underscored the "self-destructive" nature of the riots. However, the media failed to bring to light the deeper meaning behind, and the implications of, such "self-destructive" acts. Lacan's notion of ethics provides a way of reading what could be considered self-harm as a necessary corollary of true ethical action. Much of the American public was eventually willing to admit that the riots positively drew attention to the plight of West Baltimore (Johnston 2015). Yet, almost no one in mainstream media attempted to defend or to even consider the value of the rioters' destruction of pharmacies and stores in their own communities. Public figures hurried to condemn the looting of stores, burning of buildings, and smashing of windows. Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake called the actions unwarranted and self-destructive, claiming, "I understand anger, but what we're seeing isn't anger... It's disruption of a community. The same community they say they care about, they're destroying..." (Myers and Foreman 2015). Cornell William Brooks, president of the NAACP, called for an end to the rioting, declaring: "burning businesses and homes and buildings in your own community is like putting a gun to your own head" (Gorman 2015). While some did defend the destructive

actions as productive in raising awareness, few appeared to disagree with the claim that the rioters were guilty of self-harm. On this point, these criticisms *correctly* recognize the nature of the rioters' actions as seen from a particular position. The riots damaged local small businesses, destroyed needed pharmacies, and temporarily increased the crime-rate in the area (Anderson 2015). How then could one ever defend the rioters' actions as ethical or productive?

In Lacan's account, the truly ethical act possesses a self-disintegrative quality (1992).¹³⁵ This rupture with self-interest, with the self normatively defined by a concern for life, safety, and shelter, entails a break with the terms that define human interest in society. In allowing a breaking away from normative self-interest, the ethical act enables a position of autonomy, a position undetermined by an interest in the socially possible. While this break with social accords is perilous, it affords the opportunity for the creation of new ways of engaging in social-political relations.

Because it defies what is, the act *appears* as a crime, as senseless, and as self-destructive. The act is "always a crime, a transgression—of the limits of the symbolic community to which I belong" (Zupančič 2000, 83). The truly ethical act, which Zupančič describes as "the impossible that happens," (2000, 79), might appear as "evil" to those belonging to the symbolic community. However, "there is nothing 'evil' in the impossible; the question is how we perceive its often shattering effect" (Zupančič 2000, 79). The riots' disruptive actions did appear as criminal and immoral to many. Yet, the rioters, in their

¹³⁵ In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler notes that attachment to submission before the law forms the subject as such. Thus, she too suggests that a certain de-subjectivization—a "willingness not to be"—might be required "to expose the law as less powerful than it seems" (Butler 1997, 130). In this, she recognizes the link between risking the social self and the enablement of critical political practices.

seemingly unproductive demolition of their already marginal social survivability, have actually expressed a willingness to face the risks entailed in an act that has facilitated their ability to autonomously refigure the grounds of their social existence.

The rioters, now understood as ethical and agential, might still be understood as determined or as collectively or communally agential. This understanding of the riots, however, stems from a misunderstanding of autonomy as an individual state, a state-of-being *free from otherness*, rather than as a comportment (not bound within the individual) of creative capacity, *free from normative social constraints*. While the participants did not gain access to a state of freedom from the influence of others, their refusal to follow the incitement to adjust created *a space of creative agency*, where entirely novel forms of sociality and justice might develop.

In breaking with the given, an inherently destructive process as shown in the Lacanian account of the ethical act, the rioters moved beyond the capacity to just choose from among the socially acceptable options set before them. Their creative actions took place in a context of rebirth, a place where they had removed themselves from social roles and expectations, even to the point of endangering their social integrity. Action taken from this space beyond circumscription by the normatively “possible” indicates agency, yes, but more importantly, it points to an agency freed from the restraints of what has been deemed socially feasible.

Agency, defined as the ability to act, does not necessarily entail the ability to act in a manner that disregards the social determinates that seek to limit the possibilities of action. The rioters reached past the realm of actions seen as possible. They refused to adjust to the standards of the thinkable. Their radical “No” epitomizes what I have described as a

comportment of receptive autonomy. This “No” does not ensure that a certain path or moral stance will be taken individually or collectively. Rather, it opens up the possibility of configuring the self and the social in ways radically different from everything previously thought possible. The rioters varied in their goals, in their reasons for participating, and in their actions and attitudes. Rather than a uniform adherence to a guiding principle or moral aim, the rioters shared only their enactment of refusal in a context of collective action.

Critique, sometimes leading to a refusal, and an openness to relationality characterizes the comportment of receptive autonomy that I suggest offers an ethical-political corrective to the liberal notion of autonomy as self-reliance and rational social adaptation. The very realization that masterful self-sovereignty is an unattainable and detrimental ideal enables those who ultimately recognize this ideal of mastery as a lie to enter into a receptive autonomous comportment. The ideal of the self-made man, the individual shorn of all dependency, hides a system in which the dispossession of those deemed “other” sustains an illusion of self-sovereignty for the privileged few who are, in fact, quite *dependent* on their capacity to exploit.

The rallying cry of the uprising, “No justice, no peace!”, serves as a testament to the resoluteness of the developing movement, its refusal to give in to “the way things are.” The hazards of continuing to live under an unjust criminal justice system, under the laws of a society predicated on the appropriation of Black labor, and under a system designed to perpetuate and deepen racial inequality appear to outweigh the risks associated with civil unrest as a means of social protest. The rioters’ disruptive acts of refusal have forced privileged Americans to face *insecurity* and to question the great social costs of continuing

to deny the unequal distribution of insecurity in American society.¹³⁶ While the long-term effects of the riots and their potential to lead to significant social transformation remain to be seen, it seems expedient to consider what might help to translate these acts of protest into acts of political change. I suggest that this consideration should take place with an eye to the affective dimensions of the ethical act and the responses it provokes.

The Force of Love

In chapter two, I clarify the central importance of love for autonomous comportment. I argue that love supports autonomous capacity by producing a sense of excess, a sense that habituated modes of being might be inadequate for the kind of ethos we wish to express toward otherness. Again, in this chapter, I note the importance of love's tendency to arouse a sense of excess. Love's disruptiveness calls us to attend to that within and around us that resists capture by common sense or conventional logic. In this attentiveness, we become aware of the presence of the inhuman in ourselves and in others.

¹³⁷ In love, a heightened sense of both lack and longing compels a rejection of what is and the desire to create something new.

¹³⁶ Juliet Hooker similarly suggests that the most marginalized Americans have been expected to perform the greatest sacrifices on behalf of democratic society. Hooker discusses the problematic implications of conceiving of Black political action as a form of democratic sacrifice. She suggests that such a framework of sacrifice, often invoked to explain the Civil Rights Movement, leads to the "expectation that it is those who have been the victims of racism that should do the work of democratic repair, that they should make further sacrifices on behalf of the polity" (2016, 9). Hooker suggests an alternative framing of Black politics that would foreground "instances of rioting as a form of democratic redress for black citizens..." (2016, 17).

¹³⁷ Karen Barad portrays the ethical implications of listening to and touching the inhuman within and around us. She states, "what if it is only in facing *the inhuman—the indeterminate non/being non/becoming of mat-tering and not mattering*—that an ethics committed to the rupture of indifference can arise? What if it is only in the encounter with the inhu-man—the liminality of no/thingness—in all its liveliness, its conditions of im/possibility, that we can truly confront our inhumanity, that is, our actions lacking compassion? Perhaps it takes facing the inhuman within us before com-

I will show how love, because it brings about an attunement to disruption, facilitates a critical and creative form of self-comportment. This comportment of receptive autonomy has appeared, in this chapter, in my interpretation of the actions of the Baltimore rioters. In the following section, I will outline how the rioters, in facing the risk entailed in their actions, have conveyed an openness that expresses love and through love how some dissidents have expressed a sense of self-affirmation, an affirmation of self dependent upon a responsiveness to, rather than a rejection of, otherness.

Joan Copjec's account of the subject's emergence in narcissism elucidates how embracing self-rupture and opening to otherness demonstrates a loving exaltation of the self. Copjec begins her reading of Freud's essay "On Narcissism," by noting Freud's distinction between autoeroticism and primary narcissism. In its initial autoerotic state, the self as such, does not yet exist. Originally in a state of undifferentiated sensations, in a condition of pure pleasurable diffusion, the infant-organism is not yet differentiated from her environment. Some action must occur before she can realize her position as an entity distinct from an unbounded field of pleasure—a field with no outside and no inside. A certain movement must take place before the infant realizes a difference between her own being and the world (Freud 1957).

In Copjec's view, it is sublimation that introduces the infant to otherness, to the distinction between self and world, between self and other. Sublimation, as the process that shifts the drive's aim away from undifferentiated pleasure to something in the external world, induces the move from autoeroticism to narcissism. Only after sublimation has

passion—suffering together with, participating with, feel-ing with, being moved by—can be lived. How would we feel if it is by way of the inhuman that we come to feel, to care, to respond?" (2012b, 216).

occurred can there be a “self,” an ego that can then become the focus for self-love (narcissism). The move from autoeroticism to narcissism, that is, from a pre-self to an awareness of the self as something to be loved, requires sublimation, a redirection of the self-shattering jouissance that sustains the undifferentiated field of sensation prior to the emergence of the self.

Copjec draws this concept of self-shattering jouissance from the work of Leo Bersani, who suggests that all sensations that overwhelm the self pertain to sexuality and thus to pleasure (Copjec 2002, 58). The overwhelming experience of existing in a state of oneness with one’s surroundings qualifies as a sexual experience of excitement and stimulation (Bersani 1986, 35-39). Because such a state is pleasurable, the organism does not readily cease its continual evasion of selfhood; it lingers in a state of self-shattering, compelled to stave off a cessation of this pleasurable experience. The disruption of this process would be the only means by which a self could emerge from this undifferentiated field of pleasure.

Something must step in to interrupt and cause a redirection of the pleasurable disintegration of the pre-self. This redirection requires an act of sublimation—a redirection of the drive away from its original aim, which is to prevent the emergence of the self in order to retain the pleasurable feeling of the undifferentiated state. The question is what causes this sublimation?

The self emerges precisely through love as an act of sublimation, through the introduction of another whom I can love. Copjec clarifies that the self arises “from the shattering jouissance one experiences in loving another” (2002, 66). The redirection of self-shattering that allows the self to become an object of love occurs in the introduction of

responsive otherness. In other words, “‘I’ is a ‘passionate inference’ ... an experience of the body that comes from the libidinal cathexis¹³⁸ of objects.” (Copjec 2002, 66). In encountering a responsive form of otherness, a form of otherness that interrupts the organism’s oneness with the world, the organism redirects its libidinal search for pleasure to this otherness, to this *something* now experienced as outside of itself. Through this redirection of libido to another, the cycle of self-shattering is interrupted and the self surfaces. The self now exists as an object of its own love (as in the narcissism common to all psychic subjects) and as a subject capable of loving another.

Loving and wanting to be loved remain tied together from the very start. Without a libidinal investment in otherness, the self would not exist.¹³⁹ Copjec explains how self-love emerges only in coincidence with other-love by reading into Freud’s assertion that especially beautiful women commonly express only narcissistic love, that they desire only to be loved and not to love others. Because there can be no self, no “I” before a love of another, narcissism, or self-love must coincide with love for the other. Women’s alleged narcissism, “their wanting to be loved ...is not opposed to loving, but is expressible only through loving. To love is to want to be loved; love is always narcissistic” (Copjec 2002, 66). This is why, Copjec asserts, “...it is now possible to see that the woman...is the subject *par excellence*. For it is the subject, the ‘I’ the ‘forger of new passions’ that appears only indirectly among objects of the world” (2002, 67). The “I” emerges only in receptive

¹³⁸ Cathexis (originally “*Besetzung*” in Freud’s German) refers to an investment of libidinal energy. The term “cathexis” derives from the Greek “retention.” Peter Gay notes that “Freud thought a good translation for his “*Besetzung*” which means occupation (by troops) or charge (as in electrical charge) would be ‘interest’,” as Freud preferred to use common words over scientific Latin or Greek derived terms (Freud and Gay 1989). *OED Online*, s.v. “cathexis,” accessed August 1, 2015.

¹³⁹ In chapter three, I describe how the self emerges through an incorporation of otherness and discuss the implications of this understanding of the self for my theory of autonomy.

porousness to otherness, in loving investment in otherness, in openness to the negativity and potential harm done to the self by facing one's vulnerability to the other.

The actions taken by participants in the Baltimore uprising can be read as ethical acts of love, acts of loving and calls to be loved, an opening to love as both a destructive and self-affirming force. The act of loving and wanting to be loved, while it might appear as passive and self-sacrificing because it entails taking one's place among vulnerable *objects* that can be both loved and destroyed as well as investing the self's libidinal energy in otherness, actually works to create and to affirm the subject as both giver and receiver, as both subject (subjected and subjector) and object (objected and objector).¹⁴⁰ The rioters' seizure of subjectivity occurred as they took their places among the world of objects to be both loved and destroyed, as they demanded to be loved and to give love. The self-exposure that characterized their actions and their refusal to look away from the pain of their loved ones reinforced their sense of self-affirmed subjectivity.

Two men involved in the uprising declared selfhood in the face of those who would deny their status as full citizens and subjects. They did so through a language of concern for others in their community. In response to a journalist's inquiry, one man claimed his and his community's right to speak even as the language of dominant culture denied the humanness of their words. He stated "they think we aint human cause I sell drugs? They think we aint human because we don't speak the King's English? We reject that shit! And we smart, smarter than ever. I know I'm smart" (Hazzard 2015). The man affirmed that the members of his community—while white society could only recognize their speech as the

¹⁴⁰ Žižek ties agency to the place of the object, noting that it is the object that objects and disrupts and the subject that is subjected and submits (2006, 17).

unknowing language of criminals, as the language of non-citizens and non-subjects—were smart, savvy, and aware, perhaps much more aware than white society about the injustices hidden behind American fantasies of equality and meritocracy. In claiming this awareness and intelligence for his community, he speaks his self-affirmation. He states: “*I know I’m smart.*” Another protester joined the first speaker. He said, “Black brothers and sisters...we together out here against these police. I’m a liberator, I’m a revolutionary...I know my worth...” (Hazzard 2015). Expressing first a commitment to his companions, he ended with an utterance of self-worth: “*I know my worth.*” These statements convey that for some involved in the uprising their actions of resistance were carried out with a sense of responsibility for others. Exposing themselves to the physical threat of riot police and the symbolic threat that their actions would be seen as evil or unbounded, those who were involved in the uprising took a risk on behalf of otherness, a risk that affirmed their “I” ness.

In suggesting that one arrives at a confirmation of “I-ness,” a loving realization of an “auto” a self, only through loving another, I mean to unsettle the notion of autonomy as self-enclosed sovereignty. Rather than a liberal vision of autonomy, which appears to demand an indifference to, or mastery of, otherness—the otherness of emotionality and the otherness of the “different” from me—, receptive autonomy thrives only in receptive proximity to the emotive, the sensuous, and the disruptive.

George Bataille’s inversion of sovereignty, his notion that I call “erotic sovereignty,” clarifies how receptive autonomy stands as a comportment of self-disruption, social-dissent, and love. Erotic sovereignty occurs in openness to the “disorderliness and randomness of love” (Bataille 1986, 251). The pursuit of interconnection leaves behind the

banality of work and the imperative to self-interestedly adjust to social custom. Bataille depicts the occurrence of erotic sovereignty as “non-attachment to ordinary life, indifference to its needs, anguish felt in the midst of this until the being reels, and...the spontaneous surge of life that is usually under control...bursts forth in freedom and infinite bliss” (1986, 246-47). The disturbing qualities of the erotic, the giddiness and sometimes shock these qualities bring, shake the self free from normative constraints; the self partially ruptures but through this rupture becomes “sovereign.” This vision of indifference to the ordinary, a post-anguish embrace of previously forbidden pleasure, and a widening sense of self-affirmation describes the atmosphere surrounding the riots.

During the riots, people were seen dancing and singing in the streets (Hazzard 2015; Scharper 2015). Liquor and food previously unavailable to many people in these neighborhoods were taken and enjoyed. The actions of many of the rioters could not but be described as suffused with a kind of effusive and justified pleasure. This exhilaration spread through Baltimore, from the rioters to the entire city. A certain giddiness and excitement of something to come, something to change, simmered below rote fears of broken windows and stolen bikes. The rioters’ enjoyment, their pleasure, and their willingness to disregard the dangers they might face at the hands of the police created an atmosphere of continuity and resilience in the city.

However, the context of the riots has been and continues to be a source of widespread anxiety, stress, and fear. As much as the riots unsettled Baltimore, the terrifying and nauseating video of Gray’s arrest and beating as well as the presence of police helicopters, the National Guard, and the implementation of a city-wide curfew

contributed greatly to the prevalent air of insecurity and apprehension.¹⁴¹ During this period, the city seemed awash with emotions of both pleasure and fear, both unity and divisiveness.

Queen, a woman interviewed during the days following the riot, spoke about the sense of both brokenness and unity generated by the protesters and rioters' actions. She said: "Baltimore loves Baltimore. Get that straight. You know, Baltimore is pulling together. I think this—you know again, I say this even has transpired a new unity in the city...No more anything, just coming—you know, coming against each other. Just come together. Some things had to fall apart to fall together" (Maté 2015). Perhaps some people in Baltimore like Queen are well aware that dissolution and convergence tend to exist in surprisingly close proximity to one another.

According to most psychoanalytic theorists, such forces and emotional states—love and hate, harmony and division, unity and separation—reinforce and require one another.¹⁴² Eros possesses both consolidative and dispersive qualities. The mixed qualities of Eros manifest as both the inclination to care for others and also the inclination to destroy the self and the others whom it loves.¹⁴³

These cohesive and disintegrative forces exist together in a comportment of receptive autonomy. The rioters, in enjoying and coming together at the expense of their own social integrity, experienced the freedom and self-affirmation brought about by

¹⁴¹ This of course, is not to mention the police surveillance, impoverishment, and state-perpetrated violence experienced by citizens of West Baltimore on a daily basis.

¹⁴² An example would be the Kleinian theory of love as a form of reparation for feelings of aggression and hate (Klein 1964).

¹⁴³ In her work on feminism and its relationship to biology, Elizabeth Wilson argues that feminists, for ethical and political reasons, must come to terms with the fact that repair must always be accompanied by harm (Wilson 2015).

opening to contingency, to a concern for otherness. Explained through the paradigm of Bataille's concept of erotic sovereignty, the rioters exposed themselves to the dangers of disintegration, yet in this exposure, became emboldened. Facing the potential for social and actual death, the rioters disrupted the very coherence of their own social positions, but in this expressed a self-affirmative refusal of social dictates, a refusal achieved through opening to the pleasures and dangers of continuity with others.

Conclusion

Throughout, I have argued that an open stance toward disruption, to that which shakes us from our adhesion to normative social patterns and routines, enriches our capacity for receptive autonomy—our ability to reconsider and reconfigure the orders of meaning that structure our lives. In contrast, a denial of the need for others and resistance to and fear of incursions by otherness weaken the self's potential to embody a comportment of autonomy.

Holding on to an ideal of autonomy as non-dependence only serves to diminish autonomous capacity. As Lacan suggests, in presuming self-mastery we submit wholly to the order of the Other. For Lacan, it is precisely in the moment the infant misrecognizes his reflection in the mirror as a confirmation of his bodily integrity and self-coherence—and thus imagines he is an autonomous agent, free from otherness—that he enters the order of the imaginary, an order in which all identification is “mediated by the other's desire” (Lacan 1966, 79). Here, Lacan explains that the ego, this primary misrecognition, serves as

the basis for the subject's understanding of itself as *like others*, as like the other it sees in the mirror. From this point on, the subject conceives of itself only through the image of the other, only through an identification with the other. I contend that this misrecognition of self-mastery and non-dependence, which is ironically an adherence to an identification with the other—if it is hardened by narratives of autonomy that deny the social conditions that birth and sustain the self—increases the self's tendency to submit to the terms of normative social order. Only in moments that disrupt this illusion of autonomy does the self gain the capacity for actual autonomy.

Zupančič's reading of Kantian ethics echoes the connection I find between an affirmation of one's fundamental otherness and one's capacity for receptive autonomy. Zupančič reads Kant's emphasis on guilt, on the idea that we know moral law only through our inevitable failure to live up to it, as the true indicator of our potential freedom. As Kant contends, the effect of moral "law on freedom is humiliation alone, which we thus see a priori, though we cannot know the force of pure practical law as drive but only the resistance to drives of our sensuous nature" (1993, 82). We know moral law—the reality of our intrinsic freedom—only when we sense our failure to live up to its demands. When we feel guilty and frustrated because we know that we *ought* to act differently, that we do in fact have the ability to act contrary to our inclinations and habituated beliefs, only, then do we recognize the possibility of freedom (Zupančič 2000, 27). Guilt alerts us to the fact that we are able to act contrary to socialized ways of being, even if there is no way of knowing when we do. In the absence of guilt, with no consciousness of a radical otherwise, one misrecognizes one's inclinations as autonomously derived motives for ethical action. Zupančič explains that "where the subject believes herself autonomous, Kant insists on the

irreducibility of the Other, a casual order beyond her control. But where the subject becomes aware of her dependence on the Other (such and such laws, inclinations, hidden motives...) and is ready to give up, saying to herself: This isn't worth the trouble,' Kant indicates a 'crack' in the Other, a crack in which he situates the autonomy and freedom of the subject" (2000, 28). Only when the self realizes its foundations in otherness, its dependence on others and the force of the law of the Other, and gives up its pretensions to self-sovereignty does it begin to embody a comportment of actual autonomy.

The rioters *gave up* following the rules; their actions, carried out with an awareness that things could in fact be otherwise, that things *ought* to be otherwise, revealed the absurdity of the ideal of self-sovereignty. In attending to and prying open the crack in the Other, the incoherence between social promises and their own realities, the rioters produced an excess, an unintelligible demand that mainstream American society has been challenged to decipher. The rioters pointed out the illusory nature of white self-sovereignty, exposing white supremacy as *white dependency* on the dispossession of others.

The rioters symbolically spread the contingency and uncertainty of their everyday lives throughout the city, and from the perspective of mainstream media they appeared to place the self-sovereignty of the privileged in jeopardy. The riots have productively awakened much of American society to the falsity of their assumed security and independence. A demand has been made for an acknowledgement of the conditions of white wealth and for white society to affirm the contingency inherent in sociality and embody a reciprocal comportment of receptive autonomy.

Although it remains to be seen if those who profit from a system of racially-based deprivation and violence will avow their reliance on others, and in this affirmation, feel

fully compelled to abandon their pretense of self-sovereignty, there are telling hints that these types of responses have already begun to take place. Might the growing presence of movement-based collectives like Black Lives Matter,¹⁴⁴ Campaign Zero,¹⁴⁵ The Black Liberation Collective,¹⁴⁶ We The Protesters,¹⁴⁷ and many more indicate not only a mounting awareness about the violence committed against Black Americans but also a growing determination to end this violence? Perhaps we are seeing the beginnings of a sea change in the way many Americans conceive of and respond to the violence enacted against Black communities in this country.

How could one encourage and deepen this response? Judith Butler has suggested that experiences of mutual vulnerability and grief might foster a more receptive stance toward otherness, opening up the category of humanity to those previously denied such a designation (2004a). Butler proposes that challenges to self-sovereignty, occurrences that invite a sense of common vulnerability, might encourage interconnectivity and the spread of justice. Yet, Butler also notes that experiences of vulnerability just as often tend to produce defensiveness and provoke attempts to build up an impossible-to-achieve sovereignty over the conditions of human existence. The United States' martial response to the destruction of the World Trade Towers on 9/11 exemplifies this type of defensive

¹⁴⁴ <http://blacklivesmatter.com/>

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.joincampaignzero.org/>

¹⁴⁶ <http://www.blackliberationcollective.org/>

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.wetheprotesters.org/>

reaction to vulnerability (Butler 2004a).^{148, 149} Accordingly, experiences of vulnerability in no way guarantee a subsequent affirmation of social responsibility.

Why, then, should we expect those who are faced with the falsity of their assumptions and the hypocrisy of their ideals to respond in an overwhelmingly ethical way, with recognition of shared human dependency? While we have certainly seen an outpouring of support and shared sorrow in the liberal public as a consequence of the uprising and surrounding movements proclaiming the value of Black lives, there remains a danger that such responses will be short-lived and ineffectual.^{150, 151} To prevent the political potentiality produced by the Baltimore uprising from falling away from view, we must look to the sensibilities we cultivate and normalize in response to unsettling political occurrences.

As Jane Bennett suggests, ethics involves a sensuous and energetic dimension. Bennett explains that, “regardless of whether the ethical code is conceived as divine

¹⁴⁸ Naomi Klein points out that neoliberal politicians and policymakers often take advantage of shocking and upsetting occurrences to push through exploitative economic agendas (Klein 2007).

¹⁴⁹ Žižek refers to 9/11 as an explicit opportunity for either the commencement of an ethical act or for a turning away from disturbance toward an obedience to the comforting authority of the super-ego: “One should recall that there are two fundamental ways to react to such traumatic events which cause unbearable anxiety: the way of superego and the way of the act” (2001b, 57-8).

¹⁵⁰ Mathew Clair explains that social awareness about racial injustice does not always lead to significant social change. Consequently, more attention needs to be focused on white responses to racial injustice and how these responses might or might not lead to change. He states, “as history reveals, sympathetic attention does not always translate into policy. Even when it does, long-term change can be elusive...The receptivity of particular white audiences has fluctuated over time, and with it—in tandem, arguably—various indicators of racial inequality. Perhaps just as pressing, then, as interpreting blackness for white audiences is interpreting the cause and consequences of white attention for the rest of us” (2016).

¹⁵¹ As Saidiya Hartman claims, white peoples’ empathetic distress might actually express a further effacement of Black peoples’ subjectivity. Hartman explains, “the effort to counteract the commonplace callousness to black suffering requires that the white body be positioned in the place of the black body in order to make this suffering visible and intelligible. Yet if this violence can become palpable and indignation can be fully aroused only through a masochistic fantasy, then it becomes clear that empathy is double-edged, for in making the other’s suffering one’s own, this suffering is occluded by the other’s obliteration” (1997, 19).

command or pragmatic rule, if it is to be transformed into acts, affects must be engaged, orchestrated, and libidinally bound to it—codes alone seem unable to propel their own enactment, at least for many people under most circumstances” (2001 131). If we presume that the enactment of an ethos requires a motivating affective force, we cannot expect emotions evocative of stagnation and woe to encourage ethical comportments of receptivity. Tarrying with grief is unlikely to encourage privileged society to embody a reciprocal (in response to the protesters and rioters) comportment of receptive autonomy. Yet, it is precisely such a comportment of receptivity that would allow Americans, in general, to reject the given normative order and create a new *nomos*, a new web of meaning, that could reshape American society.

Bonnie Honig, Wendy Brown, and Nancy Luxon warn against the threat of “left melancholy” that can result from settling down into patterns of political misery, even if they are justified and express a well-intentioned empathy for others’ suffering. Brown explains that “left melancholy is Benjamin’s unambivalent epithet for the revolutionary hack who is, finally, attached more to a particular political analysis or idea—even to the failure of that ideal—than to seizing possibilities for radical change in the present” (1999, 20). Here, Brown turns to Freud’s account of melancholy to explain the dangers of refusing to accept loss in favor of nursing failed beliefs and old sorrows. Freud recognized that there was always the danger that an unavowed loss of a loved ideal or person might lead to an internalization of this lost entity, which would then become the target of vicious self-reproach (Freud 1917). This self-beratement would weaken the self’s resolve and desire to make new loving attachments. In the Left melancholic’s case, this type of despondence dampens any desire to explore new modes of political solidarity.

Luxon reads contemporary political theory's frequent turn to concepts of mourning and melancholy as a means to explain or advocate a certain political posture, as possibly stifling a politics invigorated by antagonism or anger (Luxon 2016). She suggests that using the framework of melancholia and mourning to think about political life could result in an avoidance or pathologizing of anger, the kind of anger that might stimulate political action and significant social change (Luxon 2016, 153). Figuring politics through the lens of grief might discourage a praxis that looks creatively and passionately to a new political future.¹⁵²

Honig explores the limits of a politics of mourning as it is presented in Butler's reading of *Antigone* in *Precarious Life*. Butler suggests that Creon's refusal to allow Antigone to mourn for her brother Polyneices, an enemy of the state, exemplifies the statist refusal to acknowledge a commonality of vulnerability with the "other" to the state or the community (Butler 2004a, 36). Honig contends that Butler's "politics or ethics premised on human commonalities of vulnerability and mortality" (Honig 2013, 45) leaves little incentive for creative political action. Honig instead advocates for a different reading of *Antigone*, one that "does not just immerse us in a politics of *lamentation* premised on shared finitude but also inaugurates an insurgent politics of lamentation that solicits out of us a potentially shared natality" (2013, 85). Honig proposes a politics of vitality and creativity rather than one of finitude and mourning.

While I agree with Honig's assessment of the need for a politics of creativity and identify with her wariness of a politics based on grief, I do not necessarily see creativity as tied only to natality and vitality. Rather, I find that creative force comes also from exposure

¹⁵² In *Crisis of Authority: Politics, Trust, and Truth-telling in Freud and Foucault*, Luxon suggests that Judith Butler's particular emphasis on exposure, because it seems to suggest "that empowerment will be tempted toward command" (2013, 38), works against the conceptualization of socially transformative ethical-political practices.

to uncertainty, loss, and, sometimes, social death.¹⁵³ What I seek to emphasize, however, is that these occurrences that call our very being into question, that shake us away from a sense of interiority and security, do not solely evoke terror. As I have shown, such encounters are closely tied to the unexpected and surprising nature of love, which generates both giddiness and pleasure.

The motivation to allow disruption to enable our breaking-free from social circumscription is much more likely to come from lingering with the erotic affects of longing, pleasure, and love than from settling down with grief. Erotic sensations generate energy, both unpleasant and pleasant sensations that awaken the self to the presence of its own contours. Instead of the stagnancy and dejection that dwelling in grief tends to produce, dwelling in love encourages attentiveness to the excessive, to the pleasures and fears that await those willing to receive otherness. Erotic affects, neither inherently positive nor negative *are* inherently jarring. Love both unravels and exalts the self, and it is in this state of undoneness that a sense of self-efficacy emerges and vital social change becomes a possibility. The capacity to embody a comportment of receptive autonomy depends upon the self's readiness to welcome the disturbing, satisfying, and nourishing powers of love.

Those who took part in the West Baltimore uprising attest to the ethical worth of attending to social dissonance and of subscribing to creative discontent. An openness to what unsettles us moves us away from comforting fictions of autonomy as self-mastery and self-determination. Instead, taking a receptive approach to disruption allows us attend to

¹⁵³ Cecilia Sjöholm also notes the interconnection between natality, death, and creativity in *Antigone*. She interrogates this interconnection in her political and ethical reevaluation of Lacan's reading of the play (Sjöholm 2002).

our difference and dissonance with respect to potentially harmful social norms. We find ourselves at odds with the way things are, or have been, and predisposed to create modes of political engagement more faithful to the parts of us that resist social determination. In the ability to be troubled, we find the capacity for receptive autonomy, for the creation of self-inspired ways of living in the world with others.

Through the purview of psychoanalytic theory, I have re-characterized the concept of autonomy to reflect the inherent relationality and fragility of the self, while insisting that these destabilizing aspects of existence bring about the very possibility for autonomous ethical action. Contributing to traditions of critical theory that prize autonomous self-capacity for the interrogation of potentially devitalizing social norms, I also affirm the real fragility of the human condition. Not only do I insist on this fragility, I emphasize that this very tenuousness enables critical resistance and the instantiation of creative revisions of social existence to the ends of a more just society.

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- . 2000a. *The Fragile Absolute, Or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?*. London: Verso.
- . 2000b. "Melancholy and the Act." *Critical Inquiry* 26 (4). University of Chicago Press: 657-81.
- . 2001a. *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*. New York: Routledge.
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- Žižek, Slavoj, Rex Butler, and Scott Stephens. 2005. *Interrogating the Real: Selected Writings*. London: Continuum.
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UNIVERSITIES AND DEGREES

Johns Hopkins University, Ph.D. in Political Science (Political Theory; The Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality; International Relations)

Dissertation successfully defended on September 23, 2016

Degree conferral will take place on May 24, 2017

Southwestern University, B.A., *Magna Cum Laude*, (Political Science; Anthropology) May 2009

University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India, Summer 2008

DISSERTATION

Receptive Autonomy: A Psychoanalytic Ethics of Creative Discontent

Advisors: Professor Katrin Pahl and Professor Jennifer Culbert

FIELDS OF RESEARCH

Political Theory, Feminist and Queer Theory, Psychoanalytic Theory, Critical Race Theory, Contemporary Democratic Theory

PUBLICATIONS

“‘Creative Maladjustment’ in the West Baltimore Uprising,” *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* (forthcoming).

“Review: Elizabeth A. Wilson’s *Gut Feminism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2015,” *DIVISION/Review* No. 14 (Spring 2016).

“Receptive Autonomy: Political and Legal Discourse Within the Self,” *The Journal of Political Studies* Volume I, Issue No. 1 (December 2013).

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Johns Hopkins University

Love and Its Discontents, Instructor, Spring 2016 Undergraduate Course

Feminism and Film, Instructor, Summer 2014 Undergraduate Course

Contemporary International Politics, Teaching Assistant, Fall 2014 Undergraduate Course

International Politics, Teaching Assistant, Fall 2013 Undergraduate Course

Political Persuasion, Teaching Assistant, Spring 2013 Undergraduate Course

COURSES PREPARED TO TEACH

Feminist Political Theory, Black Political Thought, Intro to Political Theory, Psychoanalysis and Political Theory, Democracy and Its Critics, Rebels, Radicals, and Revolutionaries, Kant's Critical Political Thought

INVITED TALKS

I accepted an invitation to give a talk, "The Fates of Psychoanalytic Feminisms," for The Society for Psychoanalytic Inquiry's Spring Summit at the University of Chicago on April 16th, 2016.

I accepted an invitation to present my work on reading psychoanalysis as political theory at Weill Cornell Medical College on March 16th, 2016. My talk was part of an interdisciplinary lecture series, The Richardson Research Seminar in the History of Psychiatry.

I accepted an invitation to present my paper, "Emma Goldman and Herbert Marcuse: Beyond 'Mass Democracy,'" at Southwestern University in April 2014.

CONFERENCES

"Lacan on Kantian Autonomy," for panel on *Subjectivity, Freedom, and Pluralism*, Western Political Science Association Conference, Vancouver, BC, April 2017 (*Declined*)

"Political Freud and Radical Feminism," Association for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society, New Brunswick, NJ, October 2016

"Love from the Feminine Position: Joan Copjec's Subversion of Lacan's Ethics," Affiliated Psychoanalytic Workgroups Annual Conference: *On Love*, Vancouver, BC, July 2016 (*Declined*)

"Love, Autonomy, and the Ruptured Subject," LACK 2016 Conference: *Psychoanalysis and Freedom*, Colorado Springs, CO, April 2016

"Refusing the White Dream: Anti-adaptation and Black America," for panel on *The Black Experience*, Western Political Science Association Conference, San Diego, CA, March 2016

"Receptive Autonomy: Loving the Hazards of Love," The Program for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Annual Research Fellowship Workshop, Baltimore, MD, February 2016

"'Creative Maladjustment' in the West Baltimore Uprising," Johns Hopkins Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference, Baltimore, MD, December 2015

"The West Baltimore Uprising: Living an 'Ethics of the Real,'" International Society for Psychoanalysis and Philosophy Annual Meeting: *Psychoanalysis and Forms of the Political*, São Paulo and Belo Horizonte, Brazil, November 2015 (*Declined*)

"Love, Autonomy, and the Ruptured Subject," for panel on *The Vulnerability Binary in Feminist Psychoanalysis*, International Forum for Psychoanalytic Education Conference, Philadelphia, PA, November 2015

"'Creative Maladjustment' in the West Baltimore Uprising," for panel on *Racial Boundaries*, Association for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society, New Brunswick, NJ, October 2015

Panel Chair for *Sexual Transgression and Erotic Boundaries*, Association for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society, New Brunswick, NJ, October 2015

"Love: An Unsettling Comportment of Receptive Autonomy," Rhetoric Graduate Conference: *Humanism and its Prefixes*, University of California, Berkeley, October 2015

"Receptive Autonomy: A Feminist Ethos," for panel on *Theorizing Political Agency*, Midwest Political Science Association Conference, Chicago, IL, April 2015

Dissertation Prospectus: "Receptive Empowerment: Psychoanalysis, Autonomy, and the Posture of Love," Johns Hopkins Political Science Graduate Colloquium, Baltimore, MD, November 2014

"Receptive Autonomy: Feminist Ethics in *Antigone*," Duquesne University Women in Philosophy Conference, Pittsburg, PA, February 2014

ACADEMIC POSITIONS

University Affiliate Visiting Scholar in the Department of Government at The University of Texas at Austin, August 2016-December 2016

Graduate Student Liaison for the Program for The Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality at Johns Hopkins University, January 2013-2014 and January 2016-May 2016

Founding Member of the Hopkins Feminist and Queer Theory Reading Group at Johns Hopkins University, September 2012-January 2016

Colloquium Coordinator for the Political Science Graduate Student Colloquium at Johns Hopkins University, August 2012-2013

HONORS, AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS

The Wilfred Rumble Fellowship, 2016-2017

The Program for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Spring 2016 Teaching Fellowship

The Program for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Summer 2015 Fellowship

Johns Hopkins University Political Science Department Fellowship, 2011-Present

Phi Beta Kappa Theta of Texas Chapter

Alpha Chi National College Honor Society

Dean's List, 2005-2009

Southwestern University Presidential Scholar, 2005-2009
Alpha Phi Omega National Service Fraternity, 2005-2009

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Political Science Association
Western Political Science Association
The Midwest Political Science Association
The Analytic Social Psychology Study Group
Society for Psychoanalytic Inquiry
Psychoanalysis Los Angeles California Extension
International Forum for Psychoanalytic Education
Association for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society

NON-PROFIT EXPERIENCE

Meridian International Center Program Associate, Washington, DC, March 2010-2011
World Learning Visitor Exchange Program Assistant, Washington, DC, August 2009-2010
NARAL Pro-Choice Texas Legislative Assistant, Austin, TX, September 2006-July 2007

LANGUAGES

French (reading and writing); German (reading comprehension)